DESIGNING RUSSIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING MATERIALS FOR KENYAN STUDENTS

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Abstract. This article explores approaches to developing culturally enriched learning materials for Russian as a foreign language tailored for Kenyan learners, integrating traditional cultural content and innovative teaching techniques.

The main aim is to create engaging learning materials that bridge cultural differences and improve language proficiency.

We will use a combination of customized software tools, surveys, and a literature review on Kenyan culture and modern language learning methods. These tools include an interactive web platform for vocabulary training, a video and subtitle extraction tool for contextualized listening and reading exercises, and lexical approach software that provides contextualized sentences from the literature. In addition, surveys on Kenyan perceptions of Russian and research on cultural differences will guide content development.

Our research findings reveal significant cultural differences between Russian and Kenyan learners, such as different proverbs, folk heroes, and unique cultural contexts. The article also describes the three software tools, including examples and manuals to demonstrate their use in the language classroom.

Developing culturally enriched language learning materials supported by innovative tools enhances the learning process, making it more effective and engaging for students and teachers. These resources can serve as a model for creating similar materials in other cross-cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Russian as a foreign language, Kenyan learners, culturally enriched materials, interactive learning, vocabulary training, lexical approach, video tools, language learning software*

Introduction

The importance of promoting intercultural understanding through language learning has been increasingly recognized in recent years. As globalization continues to blur national boundaries, learning a new language is no longer just a communication skill but also a gateway to understanding other cultures, customs, and ways of thinking. The Russian language, rich in history and culture, offers learners a unique opportunity to gain access to a wealth of literary, philosophical, and

scientific knowledge. However, teaching Russian to non-native speakers, especially in culturally diverse regions such as Kenya, presents its own challenges. In these cases, traditional language teaching methods may not be sufficient. Therefore, customized learning materials need to be developed to meet the learners' linguistic and cultural needs.

Kenya, with its diverse linguistic landscape and growing interest in foreign languages, offers a dynamic environment for the study of Russian. The country's multilingualism, with English and Kiswahili as official languages alongside numerous indigenous languages, means that Kenyan learners approach language acquisition with a strong understanding of linguistic diversity. However, their cultural context is very different from that of Russia. When developing language learning materials for Kenyan learners, it is important to consider the cultural nuances and values that shape the way they perceive language and communication. This research explores approaches to creating Russian language learning materials that promote language proficiency and build bridges between the two cultures, making the learning experience more relevant and engaging for Kenyan students.

Culture plays a central role in language acquisition, especially when learning a foreign language. Numerous studies have shown that learners who can relate to the cultural aspects of a language are more likely to absorb and retain the learning material. For this reason, when developing Russian language materials for Kenyan learners, elements of both Russian and Kenyan culture must be incorporated to create a space for intercultural dialog within the curriculum.

In Kenya, proverbs, folklore, and storytelling are important in the communication practices of different communities. These cultural expressions teach moral lessons and serve as tools for social cohesion. Integrating Kenyan proverbs and folktales with their Russian counterparts can provide learners with a meaningful opportunity to engage with both cultures. By comparing and contrasting cultural heroes, popular proverbs, and moral teachings from both traditions, learners can draw parallels and differences between their own culture and the culture they are studying, deepening their understanding of both cultures.

In addition, Kenyan learners may approach language learning with specific goals in mind, such as studying or working in Russia, exploring tourism, or conducting academic research. Therefore, the content of Russian language material should reflect these interests. By addressing real-life scenarios and practical language use, we can ensure that the

material is culturally enriching and directly applicable to learners' aspirations.

Regarding cultural adaptation, it is equally important to use innovative methods to enhance the learning experience. Modern technology has opened up new avenues for interactive and engaging language teaching, and this project seeks to exploit the full potential of these tools. Three specially developed software programs are at the heart of this initiative: a vocabulary learning platform [https://russiantutor.ru/kenya/], a video and subtitle extraction tool, and a lexical approach software for the contextual use of sentences.

The vocabulary learning platform, for example, allows learners to practice new words in an interactive, engaging format. By incorporating elements such as word scrambling and real-time feedback, this tool helps with memorization and makes the learning process fun. Similarly, the video and subtitle extraction tool offers learners a practical way to improve their listening comprehension by providing authentic Russian speech in different contexts. This allows learners to practice real-life language use and bridge the gap between textbook Russian and everyday communication. The lexical approach software, which generates contextualized sentences from literature, deepens learners' understanding of word usage by showing how words function in different grammatical and situational contexts.

While the main aim of this project is to improve language skills, an equally important aim is to promote cultural understanding. In the case of Kenyan learners, this means providing them with tools and resources to help them overcome the cultural differences between Russia and Kenya. Our research has highlighted several key areas where these differences are most pronounced, for example, in the use of proverbs, portrayal of cultural heroes, and communication style. Kenyan learners often benefit from direct comparisons between their own cultural norms and those of Russian speakers, as this allows them to grasp both the linguistic and cultural implications of the language they are learning.

For example, while Kenyan proverbs often emphasize communal values and the connectedness of society, Russian proverbs may emphasize themes such as perseverance and individual struggle. By exploring these differences within the curriculum, we can teach language and provide valuable insights into how language reflects culture.

Materials and methods

We will use customized software tools, surveys, and a literature review on Kenyan culture and modern language learning methods. These

tools include an interactive web platform for vocabulary training, a video and subtitle extraction tool for contextualized listening exercises, and lexical approach software that provides contextualized sentences from the literature. In addition, surveys on Kenyan perceptions of the Russian language and research on cultural differences will guide content development. Thus, in 2023 and 2024, we conducted sociological surveys using online questionnaires and implemented an associative experiment. The results of the 2023 survey have already been analyzed and will be integrated into our tools [1]. The findings from the 2024 survey will also be processed and incorporated into developing the content.

Results

When developing language learning materials for Kenyan students, the language of instruction must be carefully considered, considering the learners' pedagogical needs and learning styles. Using English and Kiswahili or combining the two languages has proven to be an effective strategy in many educational contexts, as these languages fulfill complementary functions in Kenyan society. English, as the official language and primary medium of instruction in schools, provides a broad base for accessing academic content, especially in urban areas and at universities. It enables students to understand complex ideas and instructions and facilitates their grasp of new concepts, including acquiring foreign languages. However, the importance of mother tongue teaching, especially in early education, should not be overlooked [2]. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) states that "learning in a language that is familiar to learners makes it easier for them to develop their own understanding" [3]. UNESCO supports this by stating that "children who start their education in their mother tongue have a better start" [4]. Furthermore, the Kenyan Ministry of Education emphasizes that "Kiswahili plays an important role in national cohesion" [5]. By integrating Kiswahili into language learning materials, educators can use students' existing language skills to make language acquisition more effective.

A gradual transition from bilingual materials (English-Kiswahili) to Russian-only lessons is recommended for Russian language acquisition. This progression allows learners to build confidence and fluency in Russian while accessing familiar language structures in the early stages. At the intermediate level, learners can begin to immerse themselves in the Russian language through exercises, dialogs, and materials provided mainly in the target language, which has been shown to improve fluency. This gradual approach aligns with language immersion theories,

which emphasize the benefits of gradually increasing the use of the target language in the classroom to improve fluency. According to Stephen Krashen's "Comprehensible Input" hypothesis, learners are given material slightly above their current level of knowledge when learning a language. This means that the material should be comprehensible to them but also contain something new [6]. Robert DeKeyser's Skill Acquisition Theory is based on the gradual acquisition of skills, starting with the cognitive phase, where explicit explanations are required, and ending with the automatization process. Robert DeKeyser applied his theory to second language learning and explained that language acquisition occurs in the same way as the acquisition of any other skill – through practice and automatization [7].

So, by balancing English, Kiswahili, and Russian in the learning materials, we create a more inclusive and effective environment for Kenyan students. This multilingual approach respects both the linguistic diversity of the learners and the cultural contexts in which they find themselves, improving both the accessibility and relevance of the materials. This approach is supported by Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework, which emphasizes that language learning is most effective when learners also develop the ability to understand and manage cultural differences [8].

To better understand Kenyan learners' cultural and linguistic context and include Kiswahili in the learning material, we conducted a comprehensive survey among representatives of different ethnic groups in Kenya. The survey included 171 respondents from various backgrounds, including Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin, Luhya, and Somali, representing multiple cultural traditions. Participants were asked to share traditional proverbs and idioms, describe common forms of interaction between teachers and students in their culture, and provide insights into their perceptions of language learning. We also collected information about the qualities they value in a teacher and the support they feel students need when struggling.

We aimed to capture both the universal and culturally specific elements of communication in Kenya, particularly those relevant to learning Russian as a foreign language. We also investigated the participants' familiarity with the Russian language and culture and their motivation to learn Russian. Using this data, we could tailor our language learning materials to the needs of Kenyan learners and ensure that both the linguistic content and cultural references were meaningful and comprehensible.

The survey revealed a wealth of proverbs and sayings, many of which reflect values such as perseverance, respect for elders, humility, and community responsibility. These findings are invaluable for developing language learning resources that teach Russian and make connections between Russian and Kenyan cultural values, encouraging deeper engagement with the language. Integrating these proverbs into our materials serves as a linguistic comparison tool and a bridge between the two cultures that enriches the student's learning experience.

Below, we present twenty-four notable examples, followed by the English translation and Russian equivalents that convey similar ideas [9].

1. **Akiba haiozi. (Savings do not decay.)**
Копейка рубль бережёт (*A penny saves a ruble*).

2. **Akipenda chongo huita kengeza. (Someone who loves a one-eyed person would call that condition only a squint.)**
Любовь зла, полюбишь и козла (*Love is blind, you'll even love a goat*).

3. **Amani haipatikani ila kwa ncha ya upanga. (Peace cannot be obtained except by the point of a sword.)**
Хочешь мира – готовься к войне (*If you want peace, prepare for war*).

4. **Anayeonja asali huchonga mzinga. (Someone who tastes honey makes a beehive.)**
Аппетит приходит во время еды (Appetite comes with eating).

5. **Bandu! Bandu! huisha gogo. (A log can be finished by chopping little pieces.)**
Терпение и труд всё перетрут (*Patience and work will grind everything*).

6. **Dalili ya mvua ni mawingu. (The sign of rain is clouds.)**
Нет дыма без огня. (*There's no smoke without fire*).

7. **Dua la kuku halimpati mwewe. (The curse of a hen will have no impact on an eagle.)**
Собака лает, караван идёт (The dog barks, but the caravan moves on).

8. **Haba na haba hujaza kibaba. (Little by little, it fills the bucket.)**
Копейка – рубль набежит (*A penny saves a ruble*).

9. **Hapana siri ya watu wawili. (There is no secret between two people.)**
Тайна на двоих – не тайна (*A secret between two is no secret*).

10. **Haraka haraka haina baraka. (Hurry, hurry has no blessings.)**

Поспешишь – людей насмешишь (*Hurry, and you'll make people laugh*).

Тише едешь – дальше будешь (*Slow and steady wins the race*)

11. **Kutoa ni moyo, usiseme utajiri. (Giving depends on the heart; don't say it depends on wealth.)**

Не в деньгах счастье (*Happiness is not in money*).

12. **Lisilokuwepo machoni na moyoni halipo. (What is not seen by the eye is not in the heart.)**

С глаз долой – из сердца вон (*Out of sight, out of mind*).

13. **Maji yakimwagika hayazoleki. (Spilled water cannot be gathered.)**

Что упало, то пропало (*What's fallen is lost*).

14. **Mchagua jembe si mkulima. (One who chooses a hoe is not a farmer.)**

Не важно, какой инструмент, важно как ты им пользуешься (*It's not the tool, it's how you use it*).

15. **Mchimba kisima huingia mwenyewe. (The one who digs a well gets himself inside.)**

Не копай другому яму, сам в неё попадёшь (*Don't dig a pit for someone, you'll fall into it yourself*).

16. **Mshika mawili, moja humpokonya. (One who holds two things, one will slip away.)**

За двумя зайцами погонишься, ни одного не поймаешь (*Chase two rabbits, catch none*).

17. **Mstahimilivu hula mbivu. (A patient person eats ripe fruits.)**

Терпение и труд всё перетрут (*Patience and work will grind everything*).

18. **Mtaka cha uvunguni sharti ainame. (One who wants to get something under the bed must bend.)**

Без труда не выловишь и рыбку из пруда (*Without effort, you can't even catch a fish from the pond*).

19. **Mwenye njaa hana miiko. (A hungry person does not have taboos.)**

Голод не тётка (*Hunger is not an aunt*).

20. **Mzigo wa mwenzio ni kanda la usufi. (Your companion's luggage is a load of cotton wool.)**

Чужая ноша всегда легче (*Someone else's burden always seems lighter*).

21. **Udugu wa nazi hukutania chunguni. (The brotherhood of coconuts has its meeting in the cooking pot.)**

После драки кулаками не машут (*No use swinging fists after the fight*).

22. **Usipoziba ufa utajenga ukuta. (If you do not repair a crack, you will build an entire wall.)**

Коси коса, пока роса (*Mow the grass while the dew is still there*).

23. **Usitukane wagema na ulevi ungalipo. (Don't insult winemakers while you are still drunk.)**

Не плюй в колодец – пригодится воды напиться (*Don't spit into the well, you might need to drink from it*).

24. **Wapiganapo tembo wawili ziumiazo nyasi. (When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.)**

Лес рубят – щепки летят (*When the forest is cut, the chips fly*).

These Kenyan proverbs show a strong emphasis on resilience, effort, and humility – values that are deeply embedded in the culture. Interestingly, many Russian equivalents contain similar messages, emphasizing the universal nature of these themes. However, the different ways these values are expressed reflect the cultural context of each region. For example, while the Kenyan proverbs often refer to nature or daily life, the Russian proverbs are more about work and effort, reflecting the cultural value placed on hard work.

By incorporating these Kenyan proverbs into the Russian language learning material, learners can practice new vocabulary and make cross-cultural comparisons to deepen their understanding of how language reflects societal values. In addition, combining these proverbs with their Russian equivalents allows learners to grasp both linguistic and cultural nuances, contributing to a richer learning experience.

To further enrich the learning experience, it is equally important to supplement these linguistic elements with cultural narratives that bring the language to life more physically.

One of the most effective ways to engage learners in language learning is through cultural narratives – stories and characters that embody a society's values, struggles, and aspirations. By introducing Kenyan learners to figures from Russian history, literature, and folklore, we can create a deeper connection to the language they are learning. However, this exchange works best when we simultaneously recognize and explore the cultural heroes that Kenyan learners already identify with. In this way, we can make meaningful parallels between their

heritage and the foreign language they are learning and make the language acquisition process more comprehensible and immersive.

In our survey, respondents named various Kenyan folklore and historical figures that are particularly close to their hearts. For example, Wangu wa Makeri, an influential Kikuyu leader known for her strength and determination, was named as a figure who had a lasting impact on Kenyan history. This reminds us of figures such as Catherine the Great, a figure in Russian history and a woman who wielded considerable power and influence. These two women led at a time when female leaders were rare, and their stories can teach learners about the shared experience of leadership, struggle, and resilience in both cultures. For Kenyan students, these connections can bring the Russian language to life and bridge seemingly distant cultural histories.

Similarly, protagonists of Kenyan folklore offer valuable lessons and insights that can be compared to Russian folklore figures. Mogumo, a trickster from the Kikuyu stories, embodies cunning and quick-wittedness, outwitting his adversaries despite being considered weak or simple-minded. This character can be compared to Ivan the Fool in Russian folklore, who, despite his perceived stupidity, often finds clever ways to triumph and is always lucky. Both characters teach important lessons about intelligence, ingenuity, and the triumph of the underdog - universal themes found in many cultures. Introducing such characters into the language classroom allows students to make connections between the familiar and the new while exploring the linguistic nuances of each story.

The strength of these cultural narratives lies in their ability to bring language to life by transforming words and grammar into meaningful, relatable content. When Kenyan learners recognize elements of their own culture in Russian stories, they acquire linguistic knowledge and participate in a rich intercultural dialog. This approach deepens their language engagement and promotes competence, curiosity, and empathy.

To make the learning material even more engaging, it would be useful to include photos and illustrations of key cultural figures such as Wangu wa Makeri and popular figures such as Mogumo and Ivan the Fool. Visuals like these help students understand the material more easily as they can connect a concrete image to the stories and figures they are learning about. This way, the characters become more tangible, and learners can memorize the lessons better. In Figure 1, you can see a series of images that show different characters from both cultures.

Fig. 1. Collection of characters from Kenyan and Russian folklore and history

The image shows a collection of characters from Kenyan and Russian folklore and history and provides a visual representation that connects these two cultural narratives.

From Kenyan culture, we encounter the determined Mekatilili wa Menza, a strong female leader who symbolizes resistance against the colonial powers. Then, there is Lwanda Magere, who is portrayed as an invincible warrior. His strength is emphasized by the legends about his ability to resist spears. Fumo Liyongo, depicted with a sword and poetry, represents a Swahili hero with intellect and martial skill. A Maasai warrior standing with a spear next to a lion symbolizes courage and the Maasai's deep connection with nature. With his pensive expression, Mugo wa Kibiru embodies the role of a prophetic seer who foresaw the arrival of the Europeans. The cunning hare is a well-known trickster in African folk tales. Finally, Mũmbi Muthiga appears as a calm and nurturing figure, the revered mother of the Kikuyu people, symbolizing the origins of the Kikuyu tribe.

In parallel, we are introduced to figures from Russian folklore, starting with the towering presence of Dobry`nia Nikitich, a heroic figure known for his strength and bravery. He stands next to Zmei Gorynych, a fearsome three-headed dragon. Baba Yaga, the mysterious witch of Russian folklore. In his traditional winter attire, ded Moroz, the bearer of gifts during the Russian New Year, is accompanied

by Snegurochka, the Snow Maiden, a Russian fairytale and New Year character, the granddaughter of Father Frost, his constant companion and assistant. Finally, a playful Snegovik (snowman) completes the scene.

Illustrations play an important role in memory as they visually represent dual coding concepts that reinforce what has been read or heard. When students are exposed to text and images, the brain processes this information through different visual and verbal channels, creating stronger cognitive connections. This is known as dual coding theory, which states that combining visual and verbal elements increases the likelihood that the information will be retained in memory. According to A. Paivio, "Human cognition is unique in that it is specialized to deal simultaneously with language and with non-verbal objects and events. Moreover, the language system is specialized to deal directly with linguistic input and output (in the form of speech or writing) while simultaneously performing a symbolic function with respect to nonverbal objects, events, and behaviors. Any representation theory must consider this dual function" [10]. Later, J. Clark, R. Moreno, R. Mayer, and O. Caviglioli contributed to understanding how using verbal and visual information, based on the principles of dual coding theory, improves the learning process and knowledge retention [11–14].

When learners engage with the characters and stories depicted in the visual materials, they build not only a linguistic but also a cultural connection to the language. However, the success of any language learning program also depends on how relevant the content is to learners' real-life needs and desires. To further strengthen this connection, tailoring the material to Kenyan learners' specific interests and goals is important.

For many Kenyan learners, learning Russian goes beyond cultural curiosity. For some, the language opens the doors to academic opportunities at Russian universities, providing access to higher education and research programs in fields such as engineering, medicine, and science. The government of the Russian Federation annually allocates a significant number of scholarships (quotas) for international students wishing to study at Russian universities [15]. These quotas allow students to study in Russia utterly free of charge. The number of quotas for Kenyan citizens has tripled in the last five years. Russian language skills increase students' chances of getting an education under the quota system.

For others, it is a route to professional development, as the ability to speak Russian can prove valuable in areas such as business, trade, and international relations. Trade between Russia and Kenya has increased. Russia exports fertilizers, petroleum products, and machinery to Kenya and imports tea, coffee, and horticultural products. Both countries are actively working to deepen economic ties, particularly in agriculture, energy, and trade diversification. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the volume of wheat imported from Russia in the first half of 2024 amounted to Ksh. 43.30 bn, an increase of 396.56% from Ksh. 8.72 bn in the same period last year. [16].

This trend is reflected in the growing interest of Russian companies in hiring African professionals, especially in the trade and IT sectors. According to the online recruitment platform hh.ru, Kenya is at the forefront of growth in job offers from Russian companies. The number of vacancies is expected to increase 39-fold in the first half of 2024 [17]. Russia is increasingly establishing its presence in Kenya and finding new economic and cultural opportunities [18]. According to the former Russian Ambassador to Kenya, Dmitry Maksimychev, "areas of trade cooperation focus on agricultural products, chemicals, fertilizers and construction materials, among others." He also explains that "our trade is growing steadily, as according to Kenyan statistics, the volume of trade between Russia and Kenya has reached 500 million dollars (81 billion Ksh)" [19]. The repeated visits of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Kenya also confirm the willingness of both countries to engage in dialog [20].

Tourism also plays an important role in the cultural exchange between the two nations [21]. The influx of tourists from Russia to Kenya is steadily increasing, creating a need for skilled workers who can communicate in Russian in the hospitality and tourism industry, especially in Mombasa, Nairobi, and the Masai Mara regions [22]. These learners will likely benefit from practical dialogs, vocabulary, and scenarios related to tourism interactions. By focusing on such practical applications, the learning material can address the immediate needs of those seeking a career in tourism, further enhancing the appeal and usefulness of the language.

The deepening relationship between Russia and Kenya offers Kenyan learners potential career opportunities in both Kenya and Russia. The inclusion of topics on Russian businesses, tourism, and cultural exchange in the learning material can make the content more interesting and practical for students interested in these growing connections.

The inclusion of practice-oriented topics, such as business-related situations, is supported by theories and resonates with students. This is underlined by the concept of Situational Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of learning in real-life contexts [23], as well as the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach developed by N. Prabhu, which focuses on the use of tasks in practical situations for more effective language acquisition [24]. Discussions about the role of Russian companies in sectors such as energy, agriculture, and technology, as well as potential employment opportunities in these areas, make the language more relevant to learners' career aspirations.

When developing language learning materials, it is important to consider these different motivations. For learners aspiring to study or do business with Russian companies, materials should include relevant vocabulary and scenarios, such as applying for a job, navigating Russian university life, or attending a job interview. For those focusing on personal or cultural interests, lessons might include topics on Russian art, history, and customs that appeal to learners' curiosity about Russia. These tailored approaches ensure that the content is engaging and meets the specific objectives of different learner groups.

By tailoring the material to learners' interests and motivations, we can create a more personalized and goal-oriented learning experience that ultimately increases learner engagement and success in mastering the language. This balance between practical, job-oriented topics and rich cultural content gives Kenyan learners the tools to enhance their learning experience.

Based on the motivations of Kenyan learners to study Russian – whether for academic, professional, or personal reasons – it is important to recognize how the cultural differences between Russia and Kenya impact the learning experience. These differences affect how learners interact with the language and the design of teaching materials to suit their cultural background. Learners interacting with the Russian language and culture will encounter contrasts in communication styles, social norms, and non-verbal behaviors. Addressing these differences helps create an inclusive learning environment where learners feel more comfortable with linguistic and cultural nuances. Research in this area presents several theories that explain how cultural contexts influence communication, information processing, and learning strategies.

Several scholars have made important contributions in exploring these influences, each providing a framework that deepens our

understanding of how cultural differences shape educational and communication processes. Geert Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions identifies several key parameters that can be used to analyze how different cultures deal with power, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and other factors that may influence students' perceptions [25]. Applying Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions in developing language learning materials for Kenyan students enables consideration of their cultural characteristics and preferences. Recognizing the collectivist nature of Kenyan culture, for example, enables the design of group tasks and projects that promote collaboration and interaction among learners.

In addition, Edward T. Hall's concept of high-context and low-context cultures provides valuable insights into how Kenyan learners belonging to a high-context culture prefer context-rich communication styles in educational settings and emphasize indirect and nonverbal cues [26]. Similarly, Trompenaars' seven dimensions of culture, such as collectivism vs. individualism and the importance of relationships in decision-making, offer a practical guide for creating materials that suit Kenyan students' relational and collaborative tendencies [27]. Finally, Stella Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory emphasizes the importance of respecting learners' social 'face' in collectivist cultures and ensuring that materials create a supportive and respectful learning environment that meets learners' cultural expectations [28]. Research on cultural values and their interpretation through folklore highlights the significant role of traditional narratives in understanding the worldview of different communities. For example, Kim-Maloni [29] explores the unique cultural dimensions of Kenyan ethnic groups and their neighboring regions, demonstrating how folklore serves as a lens for interpreting shared values and beliefs.

These cultural differences are summarized in Table 1 and illustrate the main differences between Kenya and Russia.

Understanding these cultural differences is critical to designing and presenting effective learning materials for Kenyan students learning Russian. By tailoring learning content to these nuances, we can create materials that facilitate language acquisition and a deeper cross-cultural understanding. By understanding how Russians and Kenyans communicate, interpret nonverbal cues, and approach social interactions, educators can create learning experiences that are both engaging and culturally sensitive.

Table 1

Key Cultural Differences Between Russia and Kenya

Aspect	Russia	Kenya
Acoustic Channel	Moderate volume in speech, more reserved	Speech is often louder and more expressive
Optical Channel	Eye contact is important but should not be prolonged	Prolonged eye contact can be seen as aggressive
Tactile Channel	Minimal physical contact; formal interactions	Physical contact is more common, including hugs and handshakes
Non-verbal Communication	Gestures and body language are restrained	Gestures and body language are more expressive and dynamic
Speech Pauses	Pauses are common and indicate reflection or thought	Fewer pauses; silence may be interpreted as discomfort or disagreement
Distance in Communication	Larger personal space, especially in formal settings	Smaller personal space and closer physical proximity are common
Group Interaction	Formal, often hierarchical	Informal and more egalitarian group dynamics
Politeness and Forms of Address	Clear distinction between "ты" (informal) and "Вы" (formal)	Less emphasis on formal forms of address
Religious Practices	Orthodox Christianity has a moderate influence on daily life	Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs; religion play a significant role in daily life
Color Meanings	White symbolizes purity; red represents happiness and celebration	White can signify mourning; red also represents happiness, celebration, and strength
Ethnic Identity	Various ethnic groups are unified under one national identity	Over 40 ethnic groups, each with their own traditions
Linguistic Norms	Russian language, both formal and informal communication styles	Kiswahili and English, along with tribal dialects, communication is often informal
Ethnocentrism	Moderate level.	Low level, with a high tolerance for other cultures
Family Conversations	Reserved, respectful	Open, more emotional
Social Events	Varied formats, sometimes formal	More social, community-focused
Country's Symbols	Bear, balalaika, matryoshka dolls	Lion, elephant, Maasai people
Clothing and Dress Code	Formal clothing for work and official events	Traditional clothing for official events and casual attire is more relaxed

For example, in Kenyan culture, learners are more accustomed to physical proximity and expressive body language, whereas in Russia, personal distance and reserved gestures are often the norm. To take this

into account, learning materials should include practical scenarios that emphasize these differences. A role-play could include a Russian business meeting where students have to practice maintaining formal distance and using more reserved gestures so that they understand not only the language but also the cultural expectations behind these behaviors. Such activities would promote cultural awareness and ensure learners are prepared for real-life interactions in a Russian-speaking context.

The way silence is interpreted in Russian and Kenyan communication is also very different. In Russian culture, pauses in conversation are often used for reflection or agreement, whereas in Kenya, silence can be perceived as discomfort or disapproval. The learning material should reflect these differences by including dialogs in which students learn how to appropriately deal with these silent cues. One task could be to listen to a recorded conversation between two Russian speakers and ask learners to recognize when pauses indicate thoughts.

Another important aspect is the role of religious practices and their influence on social norms. In Kenya, religion plays an important role in daily life and often shapes public behavior and communication. Orthodoxy is still of cultural importance in Russia, but its influence on everyday interactions is moderate. When creating learning materials, it is important to provide content that considers these differences. For example, when teaching your students how to talk about holidays or traditions, you can point out that religious holidays such as Christmas carry more social and communal weight in Kenya than in Russia, where secular traditions such as New Year are more commonly celebrated.

When structuring group activities, it is also helpful to understand the differences between collectivism and individualism in both cultures. In Kenya, where community and family ties are central, students may respond well to tasks that involve teamwork and group discussion. While still valuing collective effort, Russian culture often emphasizes individual responsibility within the group. Therefore, learning tasks should balance these two approaches and encourage Kenyan students to practice teamwork and independent problem-solving in Russian contexts.

By incorporating these cultural differences into the language learning materials, we ensure that Kenyan learners not only master the mechanics of Russian but also develop a better sense of the social and cultural contexts in which the language functions. This holistic approach promotes both language proficiency and cultural competence, equipping

learners to communicate effectively and respectfully in Russian-speaking environments.

Returning to our survey of 171 participants, we would like to analyze the respondents' answers to the following questions: "What support should a teacher offer to students who have difficulties?" and "Why did you decide to learn Russian?" Several recurring themes for inclusion in language learning materials for Kenyan students can be derived from the responses regarding the support that teachers should provide to students with learning difficulties. These responses point to important considerations for content creation:

Many respondents emphasized the need for individual tutoring and personalized support for students with learning difficulties. When creating language learning materials, it would be beneficial to design exercises tailored to different proficiency levels. Including personalized tasks and activities where the pace of learning can be self-determined helps students engage according to their individual learning speed. Responses from the survey: "Personalized attention, tutoring," "Mentoring and encouragement," and "Understanding the child's perspective."

Next, the ideas of mentorship, encouragement, and emotional support were frequently mentioned in the responses. To reflect this in language learning content, we should consider adding motivational content, such as positive reinforcement for small successes, and providing guided mentoring activities or peer support frameworks. Recurring responses from the survey: "Mentorship and motivation," "Personalized instruction and time to learn," and "Motivation, moral support, encouragement."

Students who have difficulties should be offered additional lessons and revision materials. Language learning materials can include additional worksheets for practice, grammar and vocabulary lessons, and additional learning aids that students can use outside regular class time. Recurring responses from the survey: "Additional lessons/materials for the course," "Conducting tutoring sessions and personal assessments during additional lessons," and "Additional help, including individual support."

Patience was a core value frequently mentioned in the responses. This means that learning materials should foster an environment where students feel comfortable taking time to learn. Self-study tasks and explanations in gradual, understandable steps can support this. Examples from the survey: "Patience, understanding and comprehensiveness" and "Provide step-by-step explanations and relevant tasks."

Based on our research and the data collected in the survey, we have taken an innovative approach to improving the learning experience for prospective students of Russian as a foreign language in Kenya. Recognizing learners' diverse needs and preferences, we developed a comprehensive platform and two key tools to make language learning more dynamic, engaging, and contextualized.

• The first tool is the Vocabulary Learning and Practice Tool, which you can find at https://russiantutor.ru/kenya/. This interactive platform allows learners to personalize their vocabulary practice by selecting the words they want to learn and accessing a range of resources. Learners can listen to the correct pronunciation, view translations, look at contextual images, and even find relevant videos on YouTube using the vocabulary in authentic contexts. In addition, the tool offers a practice component that allows learners to improve their spelling and typing skills by writing down the selected words.

• The second new feature is the video and subtitle extraction tool specifically aimed at teachers. With this tool, teachers can extract short video clips containing the vocabulary to be learned and combine them into a coherent video file. The accompanying subtitles are generated automatically, making it easier for learners to follow and engage with the content. This tool provides a multimedia approach to learning, allowing learners to see the language in action, hear native pronunciation in real-life contexts, and develop listening comprehension and speaking skills through repeated use of the vocabulary in everyday life.

• Finally, we have introduced a tool for extracting vocabulary from sentences. This tool uses a large database of Russian books and literature to find sentences containing the target vocabulary. By using authentic sentences from novels and other literary works, teachers can provide students with examples that show how the words are used by native speakers in context. This helps to understand a word's meaning and how it works in different sentence structures and situations. This tool encourages learners to go beyond mere translation and develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the words they are learning. This aligns with the lexical approach to language learning, which is about understanding words used in real-life situations rather than finding them in isolated vocabulary lists.

The first tool developed for learning Russian vocabulary is an innovative way to meet the different needs of language learners. This tool supports auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning styles by providing a multi-layered approach that promotes holistic language

acquisition. According to Oxford Theory, accommodating different learning styles promotes language retention and comprehension by considering students' natural preferences when processing information. By integrating different strategies – such as auditory repetition, visual aids, and kinesthetic tasks – language learning can be tailored to the different needs of learners, leading to more effective and individualized acquisition [30]. Similarly, Dörnyei and Ryan emphasize that acknowledging individual differences, including cognitive styles, helps optimize the learning experience and improve engagement and retention [31]. Furthermore, Skehan points out that cognitive styles play a crucial role in language learning as they influence how learners process, store, and retrieve new information, making using different strategies even more important for successful language acquisition [32].

By integrating audio support, the tool allows learners to hear the word, reinforcing correct pronunciation. By hearing the correct pronunciation, learners can internalize the phonetic structure of the new vocabulary, which provides a solid foundation for speaking and listening. When students see the word, its translation, and the accompanying pictures, they also benefit from the visual representation, which makes abstract words more tangible and easier to remember. Visualizing the vocabulary and the translations helps students make mental connections according to the principles of dual coding theory, which states that information is better retained when presented in both verbal and visual form.

The tool's ability to type out the vocabulary learned introduces a kinesthetic dimension that promotes muscle memory and familiarizes students with spelling and structural patterns. As students type the vocabulary, they actively recall it, which is much more effective for retention than passive recognition. Active recall forms the basis for retrieval training, a language learning strategy that strengthens long-term memory by actively engaging cognitive processes.

Another important feature of this tool is the contextualized sentences in which the vocabulary is used. By presenting the words in sentences, the tool provides context and helps learners understand the role and function of the word in real-life situations. This approach is in line with the lexical theory of language learning, which assumes that words are not understood and learned in isolation but as part of larger linguistic structures. Contextual understanding, therefore, promotes the ability to use the language naturally and effectively, which is a crucial element for students aiming for fluency.

In addition, the integration of video content ensures that students can see and hear the words used in different situations. According to Mayer's cognitive theory of multimedia learning, people acquire knowledge more effectively when they see words and images together than when they see only words. Video adds multimedia to the learning experience, allowing students to relate vocabulary to real-life scenarios and bridging the gap between passive comprehension and active application [33].

A broader research base supports this approach to using multimedia to increase vocabulary. In addition, Paivio's dual-coding theory emphasizes the cognitive benefits of combining visual and verbal information for deeper processing, a concept further explored in his later work on the neurocognitive mechanisms of visual and verbal reasoning [34]. Sweller's cognitive load theory also highlights the importance of minimizing unnecessary cognitive demands in multimedia environments [35]. Clark and Mayer also examine how multimedia elements should be integrated to avoid cognitive overload and maximize learning efficiency [36]. Taken together, these theories emphasize that well-designed multimedia tools improve comprehension and memory performance by presenting information through multiple cognitive channels. These findings demonstrate the potential of multimedia to transform language acquisition by linking abstract concepts to concrete, real-world contexts.

In practice, teachers or learners can adapt and customize the tool depending on the specific language learning objectives. For example, a teacher could select thematic vocabulary related to academic contexts and create a list of relevant words for students to practice using the tool. Through various media formats, including audio recordings, images, sentences, and videos, this tool supports the integration of vocabulary into long-term memory and keeps learners engaged with the content.

Figure 2 below shows a screenshot of the user interface and the user-friendly design, allowing easy navigation and interaction with the tool's features. The user interface is designed so learners can intuitively access all aspects of vocabulary learning, from listening to pronouncing a word to typing the word and viewing its contextual use. This streamlined design allows learners to focus on learning without being overwhelmed by complex navigation elements.

This vocabulary tool is an example of a comprehensive approach to language learning that utilizes technology and modern pedagogical theories to create a dynamic, engaging, and highly effective learning experience for Kenyan students of Russian. The holistic design ensures

that every learner, regardless of their preferred learning style, can benefit from a coherent platform that promotes language mastery through repetition, engagement, and contextual understanding.

Fig. 2. Screenshot of the user interface of the vocabulary learning program with integrated auditory, visual, and kinesthetic functions

The second tool developed in this research project, a video and subtitle extractor, represents a transformative approach for language teachers who want to immerse their students in authentic Russian language content. This tool is a testament to the advances in computer-assisted language learning and a versatile tool for teachers who value contextually rich language skills and multimodal learning.

The tool has an extensive database of media, from feature films and documentaries to cartoons and songs, all in Russian. This variety of content allows teachers to cater to their students' interests and linguistic needs and teach them the language used in different genres and registers. Teachers can enter specific vocabulary or phrases into the tool's search function and filter the results by media type – be it movies, cartoons, or music videos. This flexibility allows teachers to assemble a collection of short clips tailored to their lesson's thematic or lexical focus, aligning the content with the learning objectives of a particular unit or class.

Once the desired content is determined, teachers can refine their selection by adjusting each clip's start and end times, ensuring that only the most relevant excerpts are included in the final compilation. By

merging multiple clips, the tool creates a cohesive video in which the selected vocabulary or expressions are shown in different contexts. This feature is particularly beneficial for implementing the lexical approach to language learning, emphasizing vocabulary acquisition in meaningful contexts. When students observe how native speakers use the language, they develop a deeper understanding of the nuances, collocations, and pragmatic aspects of words and sentences.

The automatic insertion of subtitles in both Russian and English further enhances the learning experience. The switchable subtitles serve a dual purpose: they visually reinforce the spoken language and offer learners a reference point to check their understanding. By seeing the Russian subtitles alongside the English translations, learners can decipher complex sentences and idiomatic expressions that would otherwise be difficult to understand. The tool also offers an option to automatically translate subtitles, which saves teachers valuable time and ensures consistency when translating content. When used effectively, subtitles can improve students' reading ability, vocabulary acquisition, and pronunciation as they link spoken and written language directly.

The tool's ability to combine video and audio components with visual text supports the lexical approach and can also be explained by Swain's output hypothesis [37]. This theory states that language learning is greatly enhanced when learners are encouraged to produce language rather than consume it. Swain explains that output "can be the trigger that forces learners to pay attention to the means of expression they need to successfully convey their own intended meaning" [38]. By providing learners with video content featuring native speakers, this tool not only offers learners the opportunity to observe language in authentic contexts but also to actively reproduce the spoken elements. For example, learners can be asked to voiceover the speech patterns of the native speakers in the videos– to deepen their understanding of pronunciation, intonation, and contextual use of vocabulary.

Through repeated viewing and active participation, learners can internalize the language structures and become more confident in producing the language independently. In addition, the process of listening, repeating, and comparing their own language with that of native speakers is consistent with the idea that the output serves as a mechanism for learners to test their hypotheses about language forms and structures. This iterative process allows them to identify gaps in their own language production and encourages them to self-monitor and refine their language skills. In this way, the tool facilitates

comprehension through visual and auditory channels and encourages productive language use. This is in line with Swain's emphasis on the importance of language production in achieving a higher level of fluency.

The finished video created with this tool can serve as a versatile learning tool. Teachers can use it as a listening comprehension exercise, where students transcribe the spoken dialog, or as a pronunciation exercise, where students record themselves dubbing the video and imitating the intonation and rhythm of native speakers. These videos can also be made available to students for self-study so that they can work through the material at their own pace.

Teachers can also use video compilation for analytical tasks, e.g., to identify speakers' cultural references, humor, or rhetorical strategies. This analytical engagement promotes higher-order thinking and cultural awareness, which are critical components of language mastery. The tool's flexibility in customizing and combining clips allows teachers to tailor the content not only to the language level of their students but also to the course's specific cultural and communicative goals.

Teachers can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life language use by incorporating authentic audiovisual material into their lessons. This approach improves students' listening comprehension and language skills, enriches their overall language experience, and fosters a deeper and more meaningful connection with the language.

Figure 3 below shows a visual representation of the software's main menu. It illustrates the user-friendly interface and the wide range of customization options available to teachers. If you are interested in exploring this tool's full potential, don't hesitate to get in touch with this article's authors.

For further exploration, the sample video file can be downloaded here [https://russiantutor.ru/zip/Tishe.zip]. This file shows how teachers can use the tool to create engaging and pedagogically meaningful video compilations tailored to the needs of different learners.

The third tool, a sentence extraction mechanism, perfectly aligns with the principles of the lexical approach, which assumes that language comprehension and production are primarily determined by knowledge of multi-word units, collocations, and sentence phrases rather than by isolated grammar rules. This tool uses an extensive database of literary works, academic texts, and colloquial expressions to generate numerous contextualized examples for each vocabulary word or idiom, allowing teachers to integrate authentic, real language into the classroom.
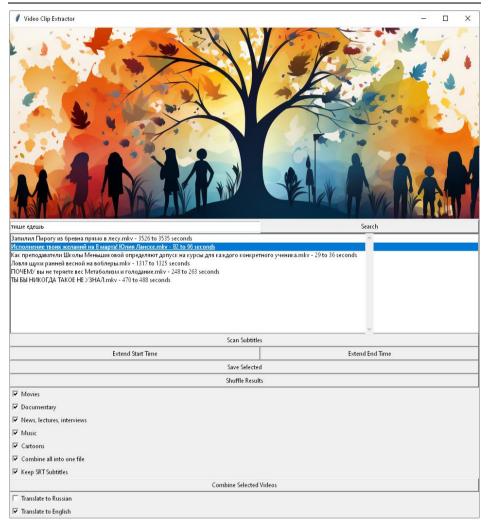
Fig. 3. Screenshot of the main window of the video and subtitle extractor with the search options, media categories, and settings for subtitle translation

By extracting hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of sentences for a single query, the tool provides a rich reservoir of language input that can be used for various pedagogical activities. One effective application is to use these sentences to teach collocations and lexical units – an approach that promotes deeper lexical knowledge and improves fluency. For example, learners can complete exercises to identify recurring word combinations or categorize collocations according to their frequency and thematic relevance, improving their ability to naturally recognize and produce these structures.

The adaptability of this tool to different levels of learning and contexts also makes it invaluable for differentiated teaching. Teachers

can customize the database to meet the needs of their curriculum and select texts that reflect specific genres, registers, or cultural themes. By familiarizing students with the language as it appears in various sources, whether in classical Russian literature or modern dialogs, the tool helps learners build an authentic and comprehensive lexicon.

The practical applications of this tool are manifold. For example, students can create cloze texts based on the extracted sentences, in which they have to identify and insert missing words to deepen their understanding of word meanings and syntactic structures. Alternatively, teachers can use these sentences to illustrate nuanced language use, e.g., the pragmatic functions of certain expressions in different social interactions. This not only helps learners to internalize vocabulary but also to understand how language works in its cultural and situational context.

Another compelling feature of the tool is its ability to support learning idiomatic expressions and proverbs – key elements of the lexical approach that reflect the cultural foundations of a language. Take, for example, a search query for the proverb "Тише едешь, дальше будешь (eng: Slowly but surely)" The tool finds a variety of sentences in which this proverb appears and shows how it is used in different contexts, from formal literary works to casual conversations. By presenting these varied examples, the tool enables learners to grasp the semantic range and pragmatic implications of the expression, thus deepening their lexical repertoire and improving their cultural competence.

This method also aligns with Michael Lewis' concept of lexical syllabus, which prioritizes teaching high-frequency lexical units over isolated grammar points [39]. The sentence extraction tool supports this by allowing learners to see vocabulary in its most natural setting – within sentences that reveal the language's broader syntactic and semantic patterns. By providing learners with these authentic contexts, the tool helps to bridge the gap between vocabulary and language use, promoting a holistic and integrated approach to language learning.

In Figure 4, we show the user interface of the tool using a search query for the proverb "Тише едешь, дальше будешь." The resulting list of ten sentences illustrates the contexts in which this proverb occurs and highlights the tool's potential to support a nuanced and culturally enriched understanding of the Russian language through the lexical approach.

Fig. 4. Interface of the sentence extraction tool with the results for the Russian proverb
"Тише едешь – дальше будешь"

Conclusion

Developing Russian language learning materials for Kenyan students demonstrates the importance of integrating cultural and technological tools into the language classroom. These materials bridge cultural differences while improving language skills by incorporating Kenyan and Russian proverbs, cultural narratives, and customized technological solutions. Tools such as the vocabulary learning platform, the video and subtitle extraction tool, and the sentence search tool provide an interactive and context-rich learning experience. Survey results indicate a need for culturally relevant content emphasizing mentorship, personal support, and practical applications aligning with students' academic, career, and personal goals. This approach facilitates effective language acquisition, fosters deeper cross-cultural understanding, and prepares learners for meaningful engagement in Russian-speaking contexts. Future efforts should focus on refining these resources and expanding their applicability to other multicultural settings.

Acknowledgments

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ПРОЕКТИРОВАНИЕ УЧЕБНЫХ МАТЕРИАЛОВ ПО РУССКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ ДЛЯ КЕНИЙСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена разработке учебных материалов по русскому языку как иностранному для кенийских студентов, ориентированных на культурную адаптацию и использование современных инновационных методик обучения.

Цель статьи описать процесс создание учебных материалов, способствующих преодолению культурных различий и улучшению языковой компетенции обучающихся.

В ходе исследования использованы комбинированные подходы, включая разработку и внедрение специализированных программных инструментов, проведение опросов, а также изучение научной литературы о культуре Кении и современных методах преподавания языков. В числе разработанных инструментов: интерактивная веб-платформа для тренировки лексики, программа для извлечения субтитров и фрагментов видео для контекстного обучения аудированию и чтению, а также программное обеспечение, основанное на лексическом подходе, предоставляющее примеры употребления слов в литературных текстах. Ключевую роль сыграли также опросы восприятия кенийскими студентами русской культуры и исследования культурных различий.

Исследование выявило значительные культурные различия между российскими и кенийскими обучающимися, включая особенности пословиц, образов героев и уникальные культурные контексты. В статье представлены описания трёх программных инструментов с примерами их применения и инструкциями для использования в учебной практике.

Разработка культурно обогащённых учебных материалов с использованием инновационных технологий способствует повышению эффективности и вовлечённости в образовательный процесс. Эти ресурсы могут стать основой для создания аналогичных материалов в других межкультурных контекстах.

Ключевые слова: *русский язык как иностранный, кенийские обучающиеся, культурно обогащённые материалы, интерактивное обучение, лексическая тренировка, лексический подход, видеоинструменты, программное обеспечение для изучения языков*

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