pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Abstract. This article examines the theoretical foundations and practical methodologies for teaching Russian as a foreign language to students with special educational needs within inclusive educational settings. Drawing upon contemporary research in inclusive pedagogy, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and differentiated instruction, the study presents a comprehensive framework for addressing the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities in Russian language classrooms. The analysis covers key methodological approaches including multisensory structured language learning, assistive technology integration, scaffolding techniques, and collaborative learning strategies. The article argues that effective inclusive Russian language instruction requires the simultaneous addressing of linguistic needs and disability-related accommodations, while maintaining high academic standards for all learners. Practical recommendations for curriculum adaptation, assessment modification, and teacher professional development are provided based on current international best practices and emerging research in the field.

Keywords: inclusive education, Russian as a foreign language, special educational needs, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, multisensory approach, assistive technology, scaffolding

The global movement toward inclusive education has fundamentally transformed the landscape of foreign language teaching, requiring educators to develop new competencies for addressing the needs of diverse learners. In the context of teaching Russian as a foreign language (RFL), the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) presents unique methodological challenges that demand innovative pedagogical solutions. Recent developments in Russian educational policy have emphasized the transition from segregated special education models to inclusive practices that accommodate learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

The theoretical foundations for inclusive Russian language instruction draw upon Lev Vygotsky's seminal work on the social aspects of disability and the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky conceptualized disability not merely as an individual impairment but as a product of the interaction between the individual and society, arguing that appropriate pedagogical support could significantly enhance the developmental trajectory of students with disabilities. This perspective aligns with contemporary social models of disability and provides the theoretical basis for inclusive language education practices.

The practical implementation of inclusive education in Russian language classrooms requires teachers to navigate complex intersections between second language acquisition processes and disability-specific learning needs. Research indicates that students with learning disabilities, attention disorders, sensory impairments, and autism spectrum conditions can successfully acquire foreign languages when provided with appropriate instructional accommodations and support systems. However, the specific methodologies for teaching Russian—a language with complex morphological systems and distinct phonological features—to students with special needs remain underdeveloped in the existing literature.

Inclusive education in the Russian context has evolved significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, transitioning from segregated special schools to integrated educational environments. Contemporary Russian legislation and strategic documents emphasize the importance of creating accessible educational environments for students with disabilities, though implementation remains inconsistent across regions. The concept of inclusion in language

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

education extends beyond physical access to classrooms, encompassing meaningful participation in linguistic and cultural learning experiences.

The distinction between integration and inclusion is particularly significant for language education. While integration implies placing students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms without substantive changes to curriculum or instruction, inclusion requires fundamental transformation of teaching practices to address diverse learning needs. In the context of Russian language teaching, this transformation involves adapting communicative methodologies, providing multiple means of representation and expression, and creating culturally responsive learning environments that value linguistic diversity.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a comprehensive framework for creating inclusive language classrooms that accommodate the variability of learners with and without disabilities. The UDL framework is built upon three guiding principles: providing multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. These principles are particularly relevant for Russian language instruction, where students must master complex grammatical systems, unfamiliar phonological patterns, and distinct writing systems.

Multiple means of engagement in Russian language classrooms involve creating varied entry points for student motivation and persistence. Some students with attention difficulties may benefit from gamified learning activities and frequent movement breaks, while others with autism spectrum conditions may require predictable routines and clear expectations. The provision of choice in learning activities—such as selecting between different authentic Russian texts or choosing between oral and written presentation formats—can enhance engagement for students with diverse learning preferences.

Multiple means of representation address the ways in which Russian language content is presented to learners. For students with visual impairments, this may involve providing tactile representations of Cyrillic letters or audio descriptions of visual cultural materials. Students with auditory processing difficulties may benefit from visual glossaries, graphic organizers for grammatical concepts, and captioned video materials. The use of color-coding for grammatical categories, manipulatives for sentence construction, and multimodal presentations of vocabulary can support diverse learners in processing Russian linguistic input

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Multiple means of action and expression allow students to demonstrate their Russian language proficiency through varied modalities. While traditional language assessment often privileges written production, inclusive assessment practices might allow students to demonstrate comprehension through oral responses, visual projects, or digital portfolios. This flexibility is particularly important for students with dyslexia or writing disabilities, who may have strong oral comprehension and speaking abilities despite difficulties with written expression.

Differentiated instruction provides a practical framework for addressing the specific learning needs of students with disabilities while maintaining high academic standards. Effective differentiation in Russian language classrooms involves modifying content, process, and product based on ongoing assessment of student readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

Content differentiation in Russian language instruction might involve providing varied levels of linguistic complexity while maintaining consistent conceptual focus. For example, all students might study the topic of Russian family traditions, but with different levels of linguistic scaffolding. Students with learning disabilities might work with simplified texts and visual supports, while advanced learners engage with authentic literary materials. The key is ensuring that all students have access to meaningful content that promotes both language development and cultural understanding.

Process differentiation involves varying the instructional activities and grouping formats used in Russian language lessons. Flexible grouping strategies allow students to work with peers who share similar learning needs or complementary skill profiles. For students with attention

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

deficit disorders, process differentiation might incorporate kinesthetic activities such as Total Physical Response (TPR) methods, where students physically act out Russian commands and vocabulary. Students with autism spectrum conditions may benefit from structured pair activities with clear roles and predictable interaction patterns

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Product differentiation allows students to demonstrate their learning through varied assessment formats. In a Russian language unit on describing daily routines, students might choose between writing a traditional essay, creating a video presentation, developing a photo story with captions, or recording an audio diary. This flexibility ensures that students with disabilities can demonstrate their linguistic competence without being penalized for difficulties unrelated to language proficiency, such as handwriting or spelling challenges.

The Multisensory Structured Language (MSL) approach, originally developed for students with dyslexia, has proven highly effective for foreign language instruction with students who have specific learning difficulties. This approach engages visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile (VAKT) pathways simultaneously, creating multiple memory traces for linguistic information and reducing reliance on any single processing channel.

In teaching Russian phonology and orthography, MSL techniques involve explicit, systematic instruction that moves from simple to complex elements. For example, when introducing Russian vowel reduction patterns, the teacher might use color-coded cards representing stressed and unstressed vowel sounds, while students simultaneously pronounce the sounds, trace the letters in sand or textured surfaces, and engage in rhythmic movements that reinforce the phonological patterns. This multisensory engagement supports students with phonological processing difficulties in internalizing Russian sound-spelling relationships.

Grammar instruction using MSL principles involves concrete representation of abstract morphological concepts. Russian case endings, which present significant challenges for many learners, can be taught using physical manipulatives such as colored blocks or cards that represent different grammatical categories. Students physically construct Russian sentences by arranging these manipulatives, simultaneously seeing the color patterns, hearing the grammatical explanations, and experiencing the sentence structure through touch and movement. This concrete-representational-abstract approach is particularly beneficial for students with learning disabilities who struggle with purely abstract grammatical explanations.

Vocabulary acquisition in inclusive Russian classrooms benefits from multisensory techniques that go beyond traditional memorization. The use of semantic mapping, where students create visual networks of related Russian vocabulary words, engages visual processing while reinforcing conceptual relationships. Kinesthetic activities such as "vocabulary charades" or "word scavenger hunts" provide physical engagement with new lexical items. For students with memory difficulties, the creation of personal vocabulary journals that incorporate drawings, color coding, and example sentences creates multiple retrieval pathways for new words.

Scaffolding provides temporary support structures that enable students with disabilities to access Russian language content and participate in communicative activities beyond their current independent proficiency levels. Effective scaffolding in inclusive Russian classrooms involves careful analysis of linguistic demands and strategic provision of support mechanisms that can be gradually removed as students develop greater autonomy.

Visual scaffolding supports comprehension of oral Russian input through the provision of graphic supports, realia, and visual organizers. When introducing new vocabulary related to Russian cuisine, for example, the teacher might display authentic photographs, provide illustrated menus, and use graphic organizers that categorize foods by type and meal. For students with auditory processing difficulties, the provision of written key words during listening activities reduces working memory demands and allows focus on comprehension rather than decoding.

Linguistic scaffolding involves modifying the language of instruction and interaction to

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

ensure accessibility while maintaining exposure to authentic Russian. This might include using shorter sentences, providing wait time after questions, restating key information in multiple ways, and pre-teaching essential vocabulary before communicative activities. For students with language-based learning disabilities, the use of sentence frames and word banks supports production of grammatically correct Russian sentences while reducing cognitive load.

Instructional scaffolding includes the provision of structured learning activities that guide students through complex language tasks. In a Russian writing assignment, scaffolding might involve providing graphic organizers for planning, offering model texts for analysis, using checklists for self-editing, and breaking the writing process into discrete stages with feedback at each point. This structured approach is particularly beneficial for students with executive function difficulties who may struggle with open-ended assignments or complex multi-step tasks.

Assistive technology (AT) plays a crucial role in providing access to Russian language learning for students with various disabilities. Modern AT tools range from low-tech solutions such as pencil grips and color overlays to high-tech software applications that support reading, writing, and communication.

Text-to-speech technology supports students with reading disabilities or visual impairments in accessing written Russian materials. Applications such as Kurzweil 3000 or built-in screen readers can vocalize Russian text, allowing students to follow along visually while hearing the pronunciation. This technology is particularly valuable for Russian, where stress patterns significantly affect pronunciation and meaning, as it provides accurate auditory models that students might not otherwise access.

Speech-to-text software enables students with writing disabilities or physical impairments to produce written Russian without the mechanical demands of typing or handwriting. Programs such as Dragon NaturallySpeaking, when trained for Russian language input, allow students to dictate compositions, responses, and creative writing. This technology removes barriers to written expression while allowing students to focus on content and organization rather than spelling and handwriting mechanics.

Word prediction software supports Russian writing by suggesting vocabulary and grammatical forms as students type. For students with spelling difficulties or those who struggle with Russian morphological patterns, word prediction reduces the cognitive demands of writing and increases fluency. Some programs specifically designed for language learning provide grammatical information along with vocabulary suggestions, supporting the development of morphological awareness.

Communication applications support students with speech and language impairments in participating in Russian oral activities. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices programmed with Russian vocabulary allow non-speaking students to participate in conversational activities, respond to questions, and demonstrate comprehension. These tools ensure that physical or neurological barriers to speech do not prevent participation in communicative language learning.

Digital glossaries and translation tools, when used strategically, can support vocabulary acquisition for students with language learning disabilities. Electronic dictionaries that provide audio pronunciation, visual images, and example sentences offer multiple representations of vocabulary words. However, teachers must provide explicit instruction in the effective use of these tools to prevent over-reliance and ensure that technology supports rather than replaces language learning.

Students with learning disabilities, including dyslexia and dyscalculia, may experience specific difficulties with Russian phonological processing, orthographic memory, and grammatical pattern recognition. These students benefit from explicit, systematic instruction in Russian sound-symbol relationships, with extensive opportunities for practice and review. The use of multisensory techniques, explicit strategy instruction, and assistive technology can significantly enhance their language learning outcomes.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

Reading instruction for students with dyslexia should incorporate techniques that address phonological awareness, decoding skills, and reading fluency. Russian orthography, while more transparent than English, still presents challenges related to vowel reduction, consonant assimilation, and stress patterns. Structured literacy approaches that explicitly teach these patterns, combined with extensive reading practice at appropriate difficulty levels, support the development of accurate and fluent reading.

Writing instruction should focus on the organizational and mechanical aspects of Russian composition. Graphic organizers help students plan their writing and organize ideas logically. Explicit instruction in Russian spelling patterns, combined with proofreading strategies and spell-checking technology, supports the development of written accuracy. The use of writing frames and sentence starters reduces the cognitive demands of composition while allowing students to focus on expressing meaning.

Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may struggle with sustained attention during language activities, impulse control in communicative situations, and organization of language learning materials. These students benefit from instructional approaches that incorporate movement, provide frequent transitions between activities, and offer immediate feedback.

Classroom management strategies for students with ADHD include seating arrangements that minimize distractions, clear and consistent routines, and the use of visual timers to structure activity periods. Instructional strategies might incorporate Total Physical Response activities, where students physically act out Russian commands and vocabulary, providing kinesthetic outlets for energy while reinforcing language learning.

Organizational supports include the use of color-coded materials for different grammatical categories, visual schedules of classroom activities, and checklists for assignment completion. Breaking larger tasks into smaller, manageable steps with clear deadlines helps students with executive function difficulties manage complex language learning projects.

4.3. Students with Autism Spectrum Conditions

Students with autism spectrum conditions may experience challenges with social aspects of language learning, sensory sensitivities in the classroom environment, and preference for predictable routines. These students often have strengths in visual processing and memory for factual information that can be leveraged in Russian language instruction.

Social communication instruction should explicitly teach the pragmatic aspects of Russian language use, including greeting rituals, turn-taking in conversation, and appropriate register for different social contexts. Visual supports such as social stories, comic strip conversations, and video modeling can illustrate these social language conventions in concrete, explicit ways.

Sensory considerations include managing the auditory environment of the language classroom, providing options for seating and movement, and warning students in advance of changes in routine or activity. The use of visual schedules and clear transitions supports students who rely on predictability for emotional regulation.

Strength-based instruction might leverage strong memory skills for vocabulary acquisition, interest in systematic patterns for grammar learning, and visual processing abilities for reading comprehension. Special interests can be incorporated into Russian language activities to enhance motivation and engagement.

Students with visual impairments require adaptations to access written Russian materials and visual cultural content. These adaptations include the provision of materials in Braille, large print, or audio formats; tactile representations of Cyrillic letters and cultural artifacts; and verbal description of visual materials. Orientation and mobility training should incorporate Russian vocabulary related to navigation and spatial relationships.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, or sign language interpretation to access Russian language instruction. Visual supports are essential for these students, including captioned videos, written transcripts of audio materials, and visual

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

representations of Russian phonological patterns. For students using sign language, consideration must be given to the linguistic relationship between the student's first language (sign) and the target language (Russian).

Assessment in inclusive Russian language classrooms must accurately measure linguistic competence without penalizing students for disability-related difficulties. This requires careful consideration of the construct being measured—whether the assessment targets reading comprehension, grammatical knowledge, oral proficiency, or cultural understanding—and elimination of construct-irrelevant barriers.

Universal Design for Learning principles apply to assessment as well as instruction. Providing multiple means of expression allows students to demonstrate their Russian language proficiency through varied formats: oral presentations, written compositions, visual projects, or performance tasks. The use of assistive technology during assessments ensures that students can demonstrate their knowledge without being limited by reading or writing disabilities.

Accommodations for students with disabilities might include extended time, separate testing locations, the use of assistive technology, or the provision of scribes or readers. These accommodations should be individualized based on the student's specific needs and documented in individualized education plans. Importantly, accommodations should not alter the construct being measured; a reading comprehension assessment should not be read aloud to a student if the target construct is decoding ability, but might be read aloud if the construct is comprehension of academic content.

Alternative assessment strategies provide more authentic and accessible means of evaluating Russian language proficiency. Portfolio assessment allows students to collect samples of their best work over time, demonstrating growth and achievement in various language domains. This approach is particularly valuable for students with disabilities, as it allows them to show their capabilities through varied work samples rather than relying on single high-stakes assessments.

Performance-based assessments evaluate students' ability to use Russian in authentic communicative tasks. These might include role-plays, simulations, project presentations, or collaborative problem-solving activities. Such assessments reduce the impact of test anxiety and allow students to demonstrate their pragmatic competence and cultural knowledge in meaningful contexts.

Dynamic assessment approaches, based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, evaluate not only what students can do independently but also their responsiveness to instruction and scaffolding. This approach is particularly appropriate for students with disabilities, as it recognizes that learning potential may exceed current independent performance and provides information about the types of support that facilitate learning

Effective inclusive Russian language teaching requires specific competencies that go beyond general language teaching skills. Teachers must understand the characteristics of various disabilities and their implications for language learning, know how to implement UDL principles in curriculum design, and be able to use assistive technology effectively.

Collaboration skills are essential for inclusive practice. Russian language teachers must work effectively with special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and families to develop and implement individualized education plans. This collaboration ensures that linguistic goals are coordinated with therapeutic goals and that consistent support is provided across educational contexts.

Cultural competence includes understanding disability as a dimension of diversity and creating classroom cultures that value all learners. Teachers must examine their own attitudes toward disability, challenge deficit-based perspectives, and advocate for the full inclusion of students with disabilities in all aspects of Russian language programs.

Pre-service and in-service teacher education programs must prepare Russian language teachers for inclusive practice. Professional development should include coursework in special education, practical experience working with students with disabilities, and mentorship from

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

experienced inclusive educators.

Ongoing professional development should address emerging research in inclusive pedagogy, new assistive technologies, and strategies for specific disability categories. Professional learning communities provide opportunities for Russian language teachers to share resources, problem-solve challenges, and develop collective expertise in inclusive practice .

The implementation of inclusive Russian language education faces several challenges. Resource constraints limit the availability of specialized materials, assistive technology, and support personnel. Large class sizes make individualized instruction difficult, and standardized curricula may not accommodate the flexibility required for differentiated instruction.

Attitudinal barriers persist among some educators who may believe that students with disabilities cannot successfully learn foreign languages or that their inclusion will detract from the education of other students. Addressing these misconceptions requires ongoing professional development and the accumulation of success stories that demonstrate the capabilities of students with disabilities.

Assessment systems often fail to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, with standardized tests that impose time limits, require specific response formats, or assess constructs in ways that create barriers for diverse learners. Developing more flexible, authentic assessment systems remains a priority for inclusive education.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of specific methodological approaches for teaching Russian to students with different types of disabilities. Longitudinal studies tracking the language development of students with disabilities in inclusive Russian programs would provide valuable information about long-term outcomes.

Investigation of assistive technology applications specifically designed for Russian language learning is needed. While many tools exist for English language learning, fewer resources are available for Russian, particularly tools that address the specific features of Russian phonology, morphology, and orthography.

Cross-cultural comparison of inclusive Russian language education practices across different national contexts would illuminate how cultural factors influence implementation. Such research could identify best practices from various educational systems and inform the development of culturally responsive inclusive methodologies

Inclusive education in Russian language teaching represents both a significant challenge and an opportunity for the field. By embracing the diversity of learners and implementing evidence-based practices such as Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, and multisensory structured language learning, educators can create Russian language classrooms where all students succeed.

The theoretical foundations provided by Vygotsky's work on the social nature of disability and the zone of proximal development continue to inform contemporary inclusive practice. These principles remind us that disability is not a fixed individual characteristic but a product of the interaction between learners and their educational environments. By transforming our teaching practices, we can reduce barriers and create conditions where students with disabilities can thrive as Russian language learners.

Practical implementation requires commitment to ongoing professional development, collaboration among educational professionals, and advocacy for the resources and policies that support inclusion. As the field continues to evolve, the accumulation of research evidence and practical experience will further enhance our ability to teach Russian effectively to all learners, regardless of disability status.

The ultimate goal of inclusive Russian language education is not merely to accommodate students with special needs but to create rich, diverse learning communities where all students benefit from varied instructional approaches and the presence of diverse perspectives. In achieving this goal, we fulfill the promise of education as a fundamental right for all learners and contribute to the development of a more inclusive, multilingual society.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 3, March -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

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