EXPLORING POLYCODE TEXTS IN EXAM-BASED SETTINGS

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Abstract

The article reports on a small-scale study that examined the impact of a polycode text to English foreign language learning, in the form of a pedagogical model of polycode text comprehension at the Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan, for second year student on specialty "Foreign Languages: two foreign languages" over 10 weeks. In this research we defined a polycode text as a complex textual formation in which verbal and nonverbal elements constitute a single whole in visual, structural, semantic and functional aspects, and which is aimed at a complex influence on recipients. The paper's objective is to examine precedential phenomena functioning in polycode exam-based texts and to show that the organic interaction between precedential phenomena and visual components is used in advertizing texts as a means of enhancing a pragmatic and communicative cognitive effect on an audience. During each week, students in the experimental group were guided through the processes of prediction, problem solving task, identifying the topic, evaluation, and reflection in the form of activities, surveys, questionnaires, and experiment. The experiment included three stages: a) preparatory-organizational, b) formative, and c) summarizing. Under the study of implementation of polycode texts they are proved to be more powerful than any linear text in accordance with their emotional, cognitive and pragmatic aspects. Nonverbal components are especially important when recipients are not able to form a clear picture of goods in their minds on the basis of verbal components. Thus, through a combination of verbal and nonverbal codes during information passing a key idea begins to "work", contributing to develop learners' reading comprehension that focuses on the process of learning to read, realize a problem, and evaluate information, especially in test-oriented EFL educational settings.

Keywords: Foreign language learning and teaching, polycode text, visualization, verbal and nonverbal codes

1. INTRODUCTION

A polycode text is a semiotic complicated formation characterized by a synthesis of at least two semiotic systems, forming together one structural, semantic and functional whole, and ensuring a complex impact on

a receiver. A polycode text is presented by texts of visual agitation and propaganda, film texts, Mass Media texts, charts, musicals, emblems, caricatures, comics and presentations. All of them are presented by complex polycode formations, comprising multi-ordinal semiotic systems to form one semantic whole and are characterized by visual, structural, composition and logic integrity. The term "polycode text" was analyzed by G. V. Eiger, V.L Yukht (1974), L.M Bolshiyanova, A.A Bernatskaya (2005). According to the majority of opinions of modern researchers the terms "polycode", "complicated in semiotic terms" texts are more preferable to identify generic terms of non-homogenous, syncretic statements (texts) to be formed by a combination of elements of different semiotic systems provided their mutual subsemantic, in other words, providing an identical significance of all semiotic systems, involved in execution of such a message (text), where impossible to substitute or skip one of them. However, to specify one of another degree and the mere fact of involvement of elements of different semiotics, different semiotic systems in a text development it is reasonable to preserve the metaphorical term "creolization" proposed by Yu.A Sorokin and Ye.F Tarassov (1990). We agree with A.A Bernatskaya (2000), and our further research will be devoted to considering the concept of a polycode text in particular. However, it should be noted that the terms "polycode text" and "creolized text" are more or less totally equivalent. According to A.A Zalevskaya (2007) this means one and the same, but should be examined from different perspectives. Such texts have been called by linguists as creolized, paying the special attention to *combination* of verbal and nonverbal components. Now the focus of attention is not a combination, but a *cooperation* of different semiotic systems. The domestic linguistics says that the term "polycode" has come into use in the recent past to identify some specific texts, including components to be different in their semantic nature. Before that, the researchers analyzing it in their papers have usually used the term "creolized", intending different meaning therein. According to A.G Sonin (2005) the passive form of the term "creolized" assumes the procedure of "creolization" of verbal texts, however, there is no initial text to undergo the process of similar transformation, as well as there is no action itself of its "creolization". However, one can disagree herewith, as the process of creolization is perfectly possible when creating banner advertisements in Internet. If a verbal text does not hit a chord with its recipients, the text should be added with an image, animation or sound, realizing the process of creolization in so doing, and more to the point, extending the range of semiotic codes, involved into reporting information for a recipient. O.V Poimanova (2006) proposes to use the term "video-verbal" to identify verbal and figural written texts. However, such a substitution does not solve the principal problem that apparently includes not only formal features of a specific term. To our mind, within this framework the term "video-verbal" itself is not void of disadvantages, because any written verbal text is video-verbal. V.G Kostomarov (2007), having remarked that usage of nonverbal expressive means in mass media texts gains greater weight, than in any other ones, even in spoken ones, offered such a form of text objectivities that can objectify signs of music and figural semiotics together with verbal ones in fact, that can be qualified as a multi-communicative one. A.A Bernatskaya (2003) supposes that the terms "polycode" or "polysemic" text are more preferable to identify a generic term of non-homogenous, syncretic messages (texts), to be formed by a combination of elements of different semiotic systems providing their mutual subsemantic.

Today the abilities of pictography continue to increase, the role of nonverbal language in life of a human-being is on the rise steadily, and this occurs against the background of relative stability of verbal means. Some of the researchers deny the ability of language expressions to function independently without nonverbal signs; nonverbal signs are necessary for us to convert syntax chains into meanings. The phenomenon of creolization is integral property for the majority of modern communications and human culture as a whole, that is why the appeared interest of the specialists to the polycode text is a not surprise.

On the one hand, a polycode text focuses the fact of cooperation of different codes if one understands a code as a system of conventional values, symbols, signs and rules of their combination against each other to transmit, process and store (memorize) information in a form to be the fittest for this purpose. In linguistics such comprehension of a code is applicable for language signs and rules of their combination against each other. In sociolinguistics the notion of a "code" is assigned to socially variable (stratified) language variants, as well as to identify some strategies of verbal planning. And, on the other hand, the term "polycode text" draws attention to a textual nature of an identified phenomenon, its meaningful and semantic integrity that recedes into the background when using the term "communicant". Hence, the usage of the term "polycode text" is reasonable and natural when identifying a text as a coherent whole to be made up of several semiotic codes. A polycode text in its broad meaning may be presented both by a single-channel one, where one channel of perception is involved to read such texts, and multi-channel one, where it is required to involve additional channels of perception to analyze the texts.

2 FUNCTIONING COMPONENTS OF POLYCODE TEXTS

A polycode text is characterized by all those properties appropriate of the rest texts; however, they take a new sound with regard to heterogeneous messages. Informational content of a polycode text is identified by the efficiency of its polycode structure, allowing duplicating information many times over. A polycode text is both adaptive and non-adaptive at the same time. The dynamics of polycode text appears through the interpenetration, complementarity and mutual interaction of polycode components, ensuring the dynamism in case of semantic origination. A verbal component is the integral constituent of polycode text. This verbal component narrows the variants of interpretation and perception. It is the specific nature of figural and verbal signs to influence the process of their perception as points out Zharkynbekova Sh.K. (2014). A verbal message is linear and may be perceived only in sequence. Perception of a verbal text is directly relevant to semantic and linguistic level of identity, i.e. it is refracted directly through the linguistic world view. Perception of figural signs is directly oriented towards the conceptual level of linguistic identity, which is usually expressed in comprehensibility of the majority of images for people, speaking different languages. Alongside with the properties to be general for all texts, such as informational content, coherence, composition completeness, dividedness, emotional breadth and etc., a polycode text is characterized by a number of the specific ones, including: heterogeneity of constituents, poly-informational content, excessiveness, ability of simultaneous uniqueness and a great degree of interpretiveness. The special attention should be given to a poly-informational content, appearing in availability of several information varieties, presented by a literal text, graphics and paragraphemics by means of which the language and technical codes can be expressed. A polycode text is characterized by four distinctive features: operating method, sphere of effect, nature and a number of signs, type of function. These features of the text determined by R.E Mayer, E. Benvenist (2001) are applicable to any semiotic system added with the following clarifications and explanations:

1) operating method is a method through which a text (a semiotic system) can affect, it is the very meaning through which it can be perceived (eyesight, hearing, tactile sense, sense of smell);

2) sphere of effect is a sphere in which a system can be recognized, can affect and can be obligatory (culture, art, art studies, linguistics, design, music, social sphere and etc.);

3) nature and number of signs are literal manifestation of letters, sounds, colors, lines, forms, plane, flavors in infinite variations and all of these constituents are the derivatives of the above mentioned features of a semiotic system (text);

4) type of function of a text is a linearity (extension in space and time), iconicity (figurativeness), continuity (continuity), spatiality (position in plane and space).

All of the components of a polycode text have a number of functions designated to make a polycode text understandable to the maximum. A verbal component is distinguished by such functions as informative, stylistic, emotive, semantic (generation of new meanings), innovative or creative (structural complication of a text resulted from its correlation with social and cultural context), integrating, communicative, accentuating (to accent attention on important details and specialities of video sequence), identifying (to facilitate perception of video sequence, identification of which is troubled subject to any given reasons: poor quality, unusual composition decision). A nonverbal component has the following functions: informative, illustrational, technical, emotive, esthetic, humorous, symbolic, stylistic and associative.

Functions of the components of a polycode text	
Verbal component	*Nonverbal component*
• Informative	• Informative
• Stylistic	• Illustrational
• Emotive	• Technical
• Semantic	• Emotive
• Innovative or creative	• Esthetic
• Integrating	• Humorous
• Communicative	• Symbolic
• Accentuating	• Stylistic
• Identifying	• Associative

Table 1. Functions of the components of a polycode text

In general, it can be stated that a multivariable view to a text as a polycode derivation is a result and reflection of a polycode nature of human communication in modern times. As its apparent tendency we should call an aestheticization of communication that manifests in intense visualization of communicative message. An aesthetic function has formerly been related mainly to the art, to the belles-lettres as a special sphere to express a human existence. A literary text affects its reader both rationally and emotionally and aesthetically; relying upon artistry, glory, i.e. upon an aesthetic constituent of information. Any element of the structure of a literary text may become a bearer of aesthetic information. An aestheticization, i.e. a base upon an outer beauty, design, characterizing practically all spheres of communications today: advertisement, mass media, politics, sphere of everyday communication. Traditionally the means of aestheticization comprise the linguistic ones, and namely they are stylistic, rhetorical aspects presenting "eloquence". Herewith, today it is obvious that a substantial aesthetic potential is in a physical arrangement of a text. This implies an intense attention to their form, game with a form. A form of a text obtains a role of additional means of its identification in common information space. A form becomes a marker to provide a maximum concentration of attention to its item. Visualization of a message is a manifestation of a general tendency to aestheticization of an image and demonstration of intermedial of our communication at the same time. A text in many of its forms of existence is perceived as the unity of a tool of linguistic constituent and figures accompanying. All the mentioned above emphasizes the relevance and significance to generate the skills of students to structure a theoretical data of a polycode text in learning process.

3. METHODOLOGY

To execute an action according to a plan and in an orderly manner with a view to perceive a polycode text we have elaborated the methodical exercises comprising five stages. As S.S Kunanbayeva (2010) points out, the exercise is meant as one of organizational and technological means of foreign language formation against the background of foreign competencies formation. The efficiency of these exercises depends upon the methodology for their formation. A repeating execution of an action in itself does not lead to enhancement in its execution, and in order an exercise to be efficient, it should comply with the following requirements:

- conscious activity of a trainee to enhance its activity quality;

- familiarity of a trainee with the rules of actions' execution;

- conscious consideration of conditions where it should be executed;

- consideration of outcomes achieved;

- understanding any reasons of mistakes made and any ways to resolve them.

That is why the great importance in exercises should be given to the instructions for a trainee - how to execute any action, consideration of any instructions for further repeating actions, as well as a self-assessment of trainees. A linguistic factor regards a system nature of language material and a degree of its difficulty. A psycholinguistic factor presupposes a consideration of peculiarities of psychical processes in activity of trainees. When elaborating any exercises in a methodological plan one should consider a number of trainees, a level of their training status with respect to their native language and any foreign language, their objectives of training, i.e. the question "what to teach" does resolve the question "how to teach", "what exercises should be offered"; any required special exercises referred to a text relying to which it is possible to realize the objective – generation of own text. When applying a method of denotative analysis to generate a skill of perceiving of any polycode texts it is advisable to divide any text exercises into two groups: exercises for semantic adaptation of general content with regard to the specific structural peculiarities of a polycode text and exercises for semantic adaptation of logic and composition peculiarities of English polycode text on speciality.

Stage I. The exercises for semantic formulation of general content with regard to the specific structural peculiarities of a polycode text are the following:

1) To read a heading, having reviewed a nonverbal constituent of a text and to make attempts to guess its content;

2) To find any key words in the text;

3) To formulate a hypothesis of a text content relying upon the key words;

4) To identify the meanings for unknown words relying upon nonverbal component of a polycode text.

At this work stage with a text the students have a task to guess a content of a text according to its heading and graphic material, and then relying upon the key words and terms. All of these preparatory exercises can help to gain a greater understanding of a content of any text discussed. The key words are the points of contact of any text and knowledge system of a student. When making such exercises one can generate the skills of anticipation of a general content of a text and commenting and analyzing of any information contained as well.

Stage II. Here are also presented the exercises to do a summarization of a semantic content of a text, seeing, that they play an important role in any text comprehension. Their objective is to motivate students, to free from any difficulties of linguistic, psychological nature, related with the perception and comprehension of a polycode text on speciality, to mobilize a verbal and life experience in the sphere of issues involved in a text, and, finally, to give any definite guides for the best remembering of information and any guides in the structure of a content.

For these purposes the students are allowed:

- to tell about the significance of any unknown words and grammar structures important for understanding of a content;

- to provide a list of the key words;

- to propose to make a cluster of the key words / word expressions.

Task 1. Read a polycode text, presented as a diagram, and give your assumption about the content of this text. What country is described in this text? What situation is in your country?

Stage III. The next type comprises the exercises for semantic adaptation of logic and composition peculiarities of a text, requiring from the trainees to generate skills and proficiencies of semantic adaptation at the level of composition parts, where the composition parts are meant as a chain of sentences specially elaborated by an author that expresses any finished idea and has its own scheme of description – a topic, the aim of which is to facilitate in realizing of an author's intention.

Such exercises include the following ones:

1) To read a text and to divide it into composition parts;

2) When divided a text into composition parts, to name each of them;

3) To identify denotations in each composition part;

4) A graphic presentation of denotation chart;

5) To make a derivative text using the denotation chart.

Task 2. Read the text and when identified the key words, divide this text into composition parts. Answer the question "How much has the fashion changed over the last 10 years?

The nature of exercises of this group is in logic and composition analysis of a text, requiring from the students to make a semantic recoding, based both upon a reproduction of a text and a partial reconstruction of a text related to its systematization. A logic and composition analysis of a text is achieved by means of a group of text exercises basically appropriate of this level of comprehension:

- composing a number of logic questions for the principle aspects of a text;

- composing a text plan indicating composition parts;
- graphic presenting of a denotation chart of a text.

When learning a graphic presentation of a denotation chart of a text, first a denotation explanation should be given to the students. This may be introduced as follows:

1) Write down what about an paragraph is and find its key topic;

2) Qualify the facts relating to this topic;

3) Present these facts of the key topic of this paragraph graphically in the form of a denotation chart.

At the IV stage a denotation chart develops in a text. This derived text may have both a productive (development of the own text – essay, composition and etc.), and a reproductive nature (outlining a material in the form of report, abstract and etc.).

At the V stage the students are offered to edit their texts technically (execution of a text's composition) and informatively (concentration, detailed elaboration of information provided).

Thus, the specific character of figural and verbal signs of a polycode text affects the process of their perception. Comparing with a verbal text, a perception of figural signs is directly referred to a conception level of linguistic identity and does not require for correlation with some of other language forms, which usually is expressed in understandability of the majority of images for people speaking different languages. The elaborated tasks are designated to develop some skills of students to understand and read a polycode text.

4 METHODS

4.1. Participants

The objective of experimental work was to identify the efficiency of the elaborated methodological model of a stage-to-stage development of skills of second year students in polycode texts on speciality "Foreign Languages: two foreign languages" L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Total participants were 50 students of two groups. The experiment was being conducted for 10 weeks. The examinees were divided into two groups: *experimental group (EG) and control group (CG).*

4.2. Procedure

Originally the students were offered to complete a task to describe a given polycode text of advertisement nature. That task was aimed to find a level of well-formedness of skills of the trainees in their polycode text understanding. Analysis of the answers gave us a conclusion that the students understood the given information encoded in a polycode text not to the fullest extent. Therefore, having analyzed the results of pre-experimental diagnostic ting when familiarizing with the grades of the trainees and after a written task for the EG and CG completed as an essay to know the understanding of a polycode text, we found that the trainees of both groups adapted approximately much the same initial level of formedness of the specific skills of polycode text understanding.

Invariable conditions for the EG and CG were: content and scope of material to be adapted, period for experimental learning, a number of the examinees in groups, approximately the same level of students' proficiency, the same teaching means, the same forms and practices of control.

Variable conditions included: different arrangement of teaching material, different methods and practice to form the skills of understanding of a polycode text.

The task of diagnostic ting if any motivation and personal attitudes of students exist in their obtaining the skills of understanding of a polycode text was to find: 1) perceiving the high significance of skills of a polycode text understanding; 2) need to acquire these skills; 3) concern in these activities. To settle this problem there was used the method of questionnaire. The text of a questionnaire comprises 10 questions suitable for the research objectives. The questionnaire was given to the students in "opened" form that is why they had to provide a full and complete answer for the questions asked. A method choice in the questionnaire is due to the fact that the questionnaire saves the time, it gives the opportunity to get the sufficient evidential material for further analysis and interpretation. All of this allows considering the questionnaire as quite efficient method for the research. The results of questionnaire demonstrated that the students did not know the meaning of a creolized text, in consequence of which they answered that they never used such type of a text on their classes on speciality. The meaning of a "polycode text" was given by the students due to a semantic processing of constituents of this word: "poly" (many) + code i.e. these texts are those comprising may codes. Therefore the majority of students (80%) answered that they likely used it on their classes. Analysis of the next questions allowed us concluding as follows: second year students can easily use a polycode text because they apply and rely upon an associational theory letting them guess and do associations for unknown words, basing on a verbal text. If they use a verbal text, they base upon any methods of new words formation known to them, parts of speech and so on. Absolutely all of the students agreed in the following: availability of a verbal component eases a polycode text understanding a lot. Any data of questionnaires, discussions, analysis of the students' grades allow concluding what skills of academic and professional polycode text understanding the future teachers have, because they cannot actualize their information, language and intellectual abilities to the fullest extent.   The obtained results of pre-experimental assessment allow us concluding that there is the necessity to develop the specific skills of a polycode text understanding on speciality purposefully, regarding all leading methodological principles of modern foreign language education. Then we précised the objective of students as the skill to understand a

text and the skill to develop the own and the derivative text and found that this required a definite arranging, first of all, of the entire teaching guidelines. Any teaching guidelines for experimental training were presented as teaching texts, consisting of a fundamental terminology and equally authentic texts and the exercises thereof, drawn up in accordance with the offered methodological model. The training process was conducted under the leadership of a teacher. Here we offer the scheme of a teacher's control activity in a text understanding teaching process (*table 2*).

Actions to be planned	Developing activities	Controlling activities
1) Selecting the texts	Assigning the tasks	Activity assessment
2) Developing the exercises	Correcting the mistakes	
3) Distributing the training guidelines		

Table 2. A teacher's control activity

In the experimental teaching the work aimed at a text understanding was executed under the leadership of a teacher in the audience, the texts were given to the students during their classes. In order to conduct an experimental research we had used the guidelines titled "A neuroscientist reveals how to think differently". In the development process the experimental guidelines had to meet the following requirements:

- conformity with the level of foreign language skills; comprehensibility in linguistic and semantic ways (familiarity of the recipients with the rest of vocabulary applied in polycode texts besides the provided one);

- conformity with curriculum of the course;

- realization of emotional content of a text;

- novelty; accentuation of information;

- availability of irritants (aggressive color palette, contract color matching, color saturation);

- identical typeface;

- marked type words (purposeful underlining of concrete words, included into experimental list);

- clear framing;

- horizontal dimensions;

- frames restricting sight angle of a reader.

Then both groups were provided with the identical guidelines in the form of a polycode text. The EG took teaching using the method of content cognitive charting of a text relying upon the elaborated methodological model of teaching with respect to understanding how to read an advertising polycode text. The CG took teaching discretely, based upon the method of questions-answers as mentioned in the text. The stages of conducting, as well as tasks and objectives of each stage were as follows (Table 3):

Stage	Objective	Task
I	To determine the meaning of unknown words	1) according to the grading scale of conventional units in the range of 0-5 to identify the subjective understanding of the meaning of unknown word; 2) the students were supposed to write down the meaning, according to their mind, and using a separate form of the opposite table of each word from the experimental list, i.e. to translate a word or to provide a subjective definition of a word's meaning.
II	To identify the understanding of a text content	to answer the questions
III	To identify the logic and composition structure of a text	To draw up a plan of a text / denotation chart of a text; to make a writing of information taken; to develop the own text

Table 3. The objectives and tasks of formative experiment

The criteria for evaluation were the following: completeness of information taken, precise understanding of information and deep understanding of a text. It is necessary to notice a stable emotional state of the students during the experiment. Due to the fact that a traditional questions-answers procedure was applied for the CG group, the work in this group was conducted with little feeling of insecurity. Thus, for example, the trainees of that group asked many questions during the experiment. According to the data obtained, the CG of students used a traditional procedure of polycode texts, gave some inaccurate data, comparing with the students of the second EG group. Thus, the trainees of the first group found it difficult to give a definition for unknown words and they got the high points in subjective grading scale of understanding of unknown words that corresponded to the high degree of their misunderstanding of foreign words. Before demonstrating a material to the students, they were notified that after a text familiarity they would complete a task of vocabulary translation. A prepared checkup test was proposed them twice. The first time it was offered immediately after a text reading to monitor the understanding of a new vocabulary. The second time it was offered a week later after the first time of its presentation to monitor the remembering of a new vocabulary. As there was no numerical ration of the women and men trained, analysis of reactions on render principle was not conducted (Table 4).

Group	Number of students	Word understanding scale	1	2	3	4	5
EG	7						*
	3					*	
	2				*		
CG	4					*	
	2				*		
	6			*			

Table 4. The results of subjective understanding of unknown word

The outcomes obtained resulted from the scaling of unknown vocabulary shall testify that new words in a polycode format given to the EG students have been understood by them in 90% on the average.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

We suppose that in the process of comprehension of a polycode text the recipients are supported by the following principles. For example, they used some structural bases upon the familiar chains of phonemes/graphemes likely found in other words known by the students powerfully and they were also guided by the figural constituent of polycode texts to a large extent that corresponds to the opinion about a high information polycode texts content to be identified by the efficiency of its structure; about a uniqueness, redundancy and quite clear space frames. More importantly it entitles us to affirm that a polycode text is a complex text where a verbal part is inherent in nonverbal one and the combination of two semiotic systems does not dissolve the boundaries of a text but quite the opposite it increases a number and intensity of associative relations inside it. For the first time analyzing an unfamiliar word a student immediately searches for the guides to identify this word as an understandable being guided by some repeating elements of individual words or expressions and by a graphic constituent of a text as well: word spacing, punctuation marks, and figures. The important fact is that each support functions not on its own in the process of a text comprehension but as an impulse for a spiral spinning away, as a means to extent and deep the turns of this spiral, actualization and strengthening of the relation between them. Comparison analysis of subjective definitions for unfamiliar words demonstrated the high level of comprehension of the words given within the polycode texts. The trainees could regularly find the better understanding of new vocabulary given in the form of a polycode text in comparison with the understanding of vocabulary given in the form of a verbal text. The conclusion about the better identification of any unfamiliar word "within the context" in dynamically developing situation was made, based upon the substantial number of clear answers taken in the process of the experiment with some polycode texts (95 % vs 45%). The number of right answers deeply dropped in the group where a work with the guidelines was based upon a traditional method. This fact may be explained by the existence of a visual variety in front of the eyes that duplicates or extents a content of a verbal text and therefore provides the reliability for understanding of some concrete words and the text in general offering the own translations the students could give less variants of different answers after completion of the task. Thus the conducted experiment absolutely allows affirming that the usage of the methodology elaborated for

understanding of polycode texts enhances understanding of an unfamiliar vocabulary on speciality during the examinations. The obtained outcomes of exploring polycode texts indicate about the necessity of further in-depth study of polycode texts as didactic means because our experimental training verified the efficiency of implementing it. Besides we identified and solved the following problems: a) pre-experimental diagnostics of polycode text level comprehension and working skills defined that there was the necessity to draw the special attention to the ways of work under the understanding of a given text which were complicated in semiotic terms; b) comparison the results of post-experimental and pre-experimental assessment allowed us to conclude that the methodological model of polycode texts comprehension elaborated by us helped to enhance some cognitive and communicative skills of the students and strengthened their motivation.

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