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**THE INFORMATION ERA: CORRELATION BETWEEN ONLINE  
AND OFFLINE EDUCATION**

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***Abstract***

In this article, we present some ideas voiced at the 'Online and offline education: a methodology for decision-making' roundtable held at Moscow State University in October 2018. The roundtable discussed various aspects of the modern information era, in particular, those pertaining to the system of relations between online and offline education. Participants in the roundtable shared a common understanding of the problems of education today: the need for a proper balance between classical dialogue and modern digital opportunities rather than for offline education being replaced by online education. In this article, we analyse how these forms of education correlate in concrete individual cases. The roundtable demonstrates that, at the stage of mastering the language of a discipline, an online course cannot be substituted for direct dialogue with the teacher. Online feedback is mechanistic, and it does not compensate for the lack of personal communication. Participants in the roundtable quoted studies by Western economists, psychologists, and philosophers that there is no single reliable source proving that transition to online education reduces costs and improves students' intellectual abilities, knowledge, and competencies. Online education is a form of modern education that is in high demand, yet it is one of the tools assisting classical offline education. The educational process should have a subjective and humanitarian focus.

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## 1. Introduction

The roundtable brought together staff and students of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University, colleagues from Moscow State Pedagogical University, the Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the universities of Novosibirsk, Astrakhan, Kaliningrad, and Ulyanovsk. Not only did the roundtable focus on the problems of online and offline education, as its name suggests, but it was held in both offline and online mode. Participants in the roundtable supported the idea of online education as a variety of auxiliary forms of education. Moreover, the roundtable emphasised the significance of humanities-based expert analysis of new projects and technologies.

## 2. Problem Statement

The roundtable opened with a presentation by Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University, Corresponding Fellow of the Russian Academy of Sciences Prof. Vladimir Mironov. He provided an overview of various technologies, which continuously emerged in the history of humanity and always questioned the established system of education. He stressed that, in the Middle Ages, students rallied against professors who encouraged them to read books instead of dictating lectures (Le Goff, 2002; McLuhan 2003). Academic boards, which already existed at the time, supported professors: printing had created a new educational space supported by the 'Gutenberg Galaxy'. The printing technology changed the teaching technology.

A similar effect has been produced by digital technology, which changes the methods of working with texts and teaching. According to Mironov, dialogue has always been central to university education, including that in philosophy. In his opinion, even the lecture is a form of dialogue, for 'when we give lectures, we look the student in the eye and take into account how often he or she attends classes' (Mironov, 2017).

In his presentation, Dr Vadim Perov (as cited in Mironov et al., 2019), Head of the Department of Ethics of Saint Petersburg State University, analysed the state of affairs in his university, which had delivered several courses online, including those in philosophy and Russian history since September 1, 2018. From his perspective, this novelty eliminated the educational space for students' and teachers' joint activities and co-creation. In some sense, the major participants in the educational process are becoming distant acquaintances. Thus, Perov concluded, he 'can support the idea of online education only as an auxiliary' (p. 12).

Participants in the roundtable, particularly, Dr Anna Kostikova, Head of the Department of Philosophy of Language and Communication of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University, stressed that one of the key goals of university education was the formation of positive thinking and the development of creative discourse. At the same time, the genres of digital communication are extremely aggressive. She emphasised that online broadcasting of visualised material contributes to its objectification and alienation from the actual participants in communication. Mechanistic online feedback cannot compensate for the lack of empathy (Kostikova & Gerbert, 2012; Kostikova, Segal, Sorina, & Spartak, 2017).

In his presentation, Prof. Vadim Vasilyev (as cited in Mironov et al., 2019, p.18), Head of the Department of History of International Philosophy of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University, mentioned that he shared common concerns. He spoke of his own experience of online education in philosophy and psychology received at the leading international universities: Yale University and the University of California, Berkeley. He believes that online courses should be used in raising awareness and advertising rather than in education proper. Moreover, they should be employed as a tool to preserve discontinued optional courses and to create lecture archives (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

Prof. Sorina (1993, 2014, 2017) from the Department of Philosophy of Language and Communication of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University supported her colleagues. However, she stressed the dramatic difference in how students and professors perceive online lectures. Unlike a professor, an inexperienced student does not understand how to listen, how to read, and how to draw conclusions. She agreed that online courses could be used for popularising science.

The roundtable was joined via video by Prof. Vladimir Diev, Director of the Institute for Philosophy and Law of Novosibirsk State University. He drew attention to the important thought expressed by a founder of Akademgorodok, Novosibirsk's prominent research district, Mikhail Lavrentyev: 'a researcher does not exist without a student'. Moreover, the system of online education is incapable of transferring personal knowledge: it virtually excludes personal interactions between the researcher and the student.

Prof. Valentin Bazhanov (as cited in Mironov et al., 2019, p.40), Head of the Department of Philosophy of Ulyanovsk State University has formulated the main question of the round table as follows: "Does online education cancel the phenomenon of personal knowledge?" In other words, what are the boundaries of de-anthropologizing human knowledge and communication procedures related to its dissemination? These borders, the speaker stressed, in particular, are outlined by the well-known phenomenon of "personal" (implicit) knowledge (Polani, 1985). This is the knowledge that is transmitted and turns out to be available only and exclusively in communication between teacher and student, in the mode of social relay, according to the principle "do as I do" (Rozov, 2012). This knowledge is non-verbalizable in principle. It is possible that from the point of view of neuroscience, mirror neurons work here, which are excited outside and in addition to the human rational sphere. The educational process can be effective if there is a feedback between the teacher and the student. The system without such feedback degrades. This, of course, also applies to the education system.

Varhotov (2014) from the Department of Philosophy and Methodology of Science of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University, who delivered his presentation offline, joined the earlier theses and emphasised two major factors associated with online education. With a reference to William Bowen, a leading expert on the economy of education (Bowen, 2018), he stated that transition to online education did not reduce costs. Moreover, Varhotov (2014) continued, advocates of radical reforms seemed to ignore the fact that the primary function of any educational process is promoting the ideas of socialisation. The failure of online education to fulfil this function results in a discrepancy between intellectual development and social maturity.

The moderator of the roundtable, Galina Sorina stressed, with a reference to Sptizer's (2014) *Digitale Demenz*, that there was not only a problem of failed socialisation but also a possibility of non-senile dementia.

Prof. Irina Griftsova, Head of the Department of Philosophy of the Institute for Education in Social Sciences and the Humanities, drew the attention of the roundtable to another aspect of the obvious and irreplaceable advantage of education in a group guided by a professor: communication among students is as important as dialogue between the student and the teacher. The methodology of expert text analysis developed by Prof. Sorina and recently calibrated as informal text analytics testifies to this fact. In conclusion, Prof. Griftsova stressed that the roundtable discussion had a meta-level significance. In effect, participants in the roundtable fulfilled a function of modern philosophy, namely, they carried out humanities-based expert analysis. This is exactly what philosophy and philosophers as experts should do today: turn new social projects into objects of critical analysis and into tests for validity and consistency with the needs of modern society and a modern individual (Griftsova & Sorina, 2018).

### **3. Research Questions**

When will online education replace face-to-face education? Is such a question possible in the near and distant future?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

To draw attention of the faculty and student community to the problems of humanization of education; to disclose the strengths and weaknesses of online education.

### **5. Research Methods**

Interviewing

### **6. Findings**

Participants in the roundtable did not oppose the idea of online courses as such. The central thesis of the discussion was that online education should not replace offline education. The roundtable emphasised the achievement of some international online education systems. At the same time, it was stressed that an 'online revolution', i.e. obligatory transition to online education instead of immediate contact between students and teachers, was inadmissible. Online education can and should play an auxiliary role in obtaining an education, primarily, that of a technology helping to solve concrete problems in the educational process. It is important to take into account the correlation between public and private funds in supporting bachelor's and master's degree programmes. Fee-paying students make their own decision about receiving an online or offline education. The experience of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University shows that students of advanced training and retraining programmes, who pay for their education themselves, prefer the offline mode of dialogue between the student and the teacher. This aspect was emphasised by Dr Elena Prokudina (as cited in Mironov et al.,

2019, p.31) from the Department of Philosophy of Language of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University. Online education is becoming increasingly reminiscent of self-education. However, as Dr Aleksandr Segal from the Department of Philosophy of Language and Communication of the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University argued, in the course of self-education, a self-educating person was not always capable of distinguishing between real and fake information, between scientific knowledge and an opinion. Interactions between the student and the teacher are an important element of education, which suggests direct communication (Koshel' & Segal, 2016). Of paramount importance are both dialogue between the student and the teacher and communication among students.

## 7. Conclusion

Although the roundtable came to an end, the discussion on organising an educational space in the information era continues. All the experts who took part in the roundtable agreed: online education is a necessary form of modern education, yet it is an auxiliary tool rather than a replacement of classical offline education. A lecture cannot exist outside the context of the region and the audience where and to which it is delivered. The educational process should have a subjective and humanitarian focus.

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