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**DIVERSIFICATION OF AN EDUCATIONALIST: REDESIGNING
POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES IN RESPONSE TO PUBLIC
NEEDS**

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Abstract

The Russian education system is undergoing dramatic changes at the moment. The article addresses the issue of the implementation of integrated PhD and MA programmes in the field of Teacher Training and Education at Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University with the aim of promoting integration of the university into the European higher educational space and international educational research. Such programmes contribute to the establishment of the Kaliningrad region as a platform in the intercultural dialogue between the Russian Federation and the EU countries. The integrative approach with a special focus on the multifunctional skills and diversification of educationalists encompasses theory and research within a paradigm that allows for the analysis of contemporary educational standards, the socio-cultural reality, policy and planning while addressing labour market studies, enrolment, testing and assessment issues, international projects on cross-cultural competence enhancement in the Baltic region, and thorough consideration of the existing experience of multifunctional implementation and cooperation practices.

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Keywords: Educational training programmes, integrated MA and PhD programmes, Resource Centres, international projects, multifunctional training.



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1. Introduction

Complex changes in the system of teacher training, expressed in the development of the Professional standard of a teacher (2013), as well as the new Federal State Educational Standards in Pedagogics aim at the modification of the content and models of teacher training, which requires the coordination of the efforts of the pedagogical community and teacher training educational organizations on ensuring the high quality standards of professional training. The project “Modernization of teacher education” in Russia is targeted at overcoming the existing problems (Bolotov et al., 2015), including the issues of reproductive approach to teaching at pedagogical institutions, low flexibility of teacher training system, not providing versatile possibilities for shifting between pedagogical and non-pedagogical majors, lack of independent assessment of the quality of teacher training in Russia.

2. Problem Statement

Under the condition of renewing the educational system, the problem of preparing highly skilled teachers professionally suitable for this type of activity has become urgent. Significant reduction of pedagogical institutions resulted in the need of variable training programmes, and the possibility of obtaining a teacher specialty by students from non-pedagogical training programmes, so called “multiple entering” in teaching as a profession. Thus, the project “Modernization of teacher education” gives a fair opportunity for designing flexible and variable educational paths on all levels of education.

3. Research Questions

In terms of the implementation of the project “Modernization of teacher education” I. Kant Baltic Federal University actively participates in the approbation of the elements of experimental modules “Scientific Research practicum” and “Theory and Practice of Leadership in the Educational Organization” (modules M2N2 and M3DV2.2 correspondingly, according to the syllabus) developed by the Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia) (Educational Programme specialization “Head of the Educational Organization”, MA level), as well as the elements of the modules “Research practicum”, and “Teaching practicum” (modules marked B2.V.03 (P) and B2.V.01 (P), correspondingly) developed by the FSAEI of Higher Education “Northern (Arctic) Federal University” (Arkhangelsk, Russia) (Educational Programme specialization “Teacher of secondary general education”, PhD level).

The cooperation with higher educational institutions responsible for implementing the project was carried out following the predetermined logic. The performers of the project developed educational programmes based on the module structure, activity approach in education, and detailed educational results. The educational programmes, as a whole, or in parts (certain modules or their elements), are subsequently evaluated by co-performers. The structure of the modules can be represented in the following stages: introduction of practical training, theoretical part, teaching practicum, scientific research practicum, self-analysis and reflexion (Margolis, 2014).

The introduction of practical training aims at primary acquaintance with basic educational technologies, which are later on theoretically backgrounded in the course of studying academic disciplines. The traditional teaching practicum needs some alteration based on the following reasons. The FSES of basic General education advances the requirements of conditioning communicative, cognitive

and project-built competences on the part of schoolchildren in the process of studying (Federal state educational standard of basic General education (5th-9th CL.), 2013). Hence, it appears that teachers are obliged to acquire the above-mentioned competences by themselves. Alongside, they have to know how to organize a studying process in order to condition competences in their pupils. This leads to a serious reorganization of the pedagogical practices and in-training sessions as a part of the curriculum. The practicum should abandon the traditional classroom system and concentrate on the modes of microteaching, seminar and project work in small groups.

Self-analysis and reflexion are based on the educational results worked out on the correlation scheme of FSES of the corresponding educational programme, and FSES of the basic general education and the professional standard of the teacher developed by the Ministry of Labour (Federal state educational standard of basic General education, 2013; Federal state educational standard of higher education for the training 44.04.01 Pedagogical education, 2014; Professional standard of a teacher, 2013). The pool of assessment tools includes case-studying tasks, course projects, solving context and analytical tasks, tests, and training sessions.

One of the essential innovations in terms of the project implementation is to actively approach future teachers' training, resulting in a more practically oriented educational content. We imply closer networking cooperation of higher educational institutions with secondary schools and other educational organizations on the basis of school-university partnership. It is indicated in a more expressed involvement of schools in the process of designing the strategy of in-training sessions for teachers and practitioners. The school becomes responsible for conditioning the implementation of professional competence abilities in students while the university accounts for the reflexion on these abilities through scientific research practicum as well as for conditioning professional cognitive skills.

4. Purpose of the Study

The participants of the approbation stage on the part of IKBFU are twelve 1st-year MA students, as a part of the MA programme 44.04.01 "Pedagogical education" and five 1st to 3rd-year PhD students, part of the PhD programme 44.06.01 "Education and pedagogical sciences". The undergraduate students within their scientific research practicum carry out scientific researches on the selected subjects. They aim at studying the main stages of scientific work (stating the problem and the goals, scrutinizing the reference list, analysing the experimental data, preparing the report on the work done during the research); acquiring different methods of collecting, analysing and processing their research data.

The global labour market and the internationalization of research projects go with certain demands. More and more, companies and universities require their employees and students to adapt to a multicultural environment. This creates a need for new dynamic concepts of soft skills for MA graduates and PhD students. The ability to understand people from different cultures, to interact with them effectively, and to become cross-cultural mediators is quite an urgent need worldwide. The educationalists of IKBFU have launched a number of international projects within a scheme of integrated MA and PhD programmes implementation for the last five years (Budarina & Shevchenko, 2015). The importance of such projects is a shared issue among the pedagogical community. These projects are aimed at making IKBFU the centre for global integration and multifunctional cooperation in the Baltic

region, promoting Kaliningrad enclave as a unique platform for intercultural dialogue between Russia and the EU countries.

The online platform for guided language exchange “Smart Educational Autonomy through Guided Language Learning” (SEAGULL, n.d.) is a prominent international project, into which the educationalists of IKBFU are involved (SEAGULL, n.d.). The aim of the project is to support tandem learning in various ways. The first task of the project consortium is to create a virtual learning platform which provides references to effective independent learning methods and links to grammatical explanations of various languages. The second task is the development of topic sheets for communicative activities in all the languages involved. These topic sheets function as a basis for the conversations in Language Learning Partnerships in which the participants can communicate with each other to learn each other’s language. They also serve as a guideline for a variety of topics and grammar structures according to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The pairing of the tandem partners is carried out and supported by the University of Greifswald. The participating institutions enter into agreements about taking exams and certifying language levels achieved through the tandem programme. Activities and tasks include the establishment of a platform for independent learning for each language; the definition of criteria for topic sheets (content, layout, cross-cultural competence issues, etc.); the development of the materials; the design of a homepage for distribution and advertisement; the development of a strategy for the distribution, use of the project results and the final evaluation.

“Baltic Young Learners of English Corpus” (BYLEC) is another interdisciplinary project (Andersson & Sundh, 2014; Sundh, 2016). It emerged as a pilot study “Young Learners on Gotland and in Kaliningrad in Communication in English with the Use of Digital Tools” [10] five years ago, with the aim of investigating the cross-platform communication techniques and Second Language Teaching and Learning modes between Russian and Swedish Young Learners. The project was initially used as a resource for in-training of MA students studying Pedagogy and Theory and Methodology of SLT in IKBFU. Now it is a different multidisciplinary study comprising of seven universities and approximately twenty schools in six countries in the Baltic Region on young learners’ current use and learning of the English language as their second language. It aims at providing material for research on second-language varieties of English by 12-year-olds and creating a language corpus on the use of English in the Baltic region (Sundh, 2016). The highly integrative nature of the approach to the project yields a gamut of resources for multifunctional use by IKBFU educationalists in the implementation of MA and PhD programmes on theory and methodology of SLT and professional education in general. Such projects are aimed at making IKBFU the centre for global integration and multifunctional cooperation in the Baltic region, promoting Kaliningrad enclave as a unique platform for intercultural dialogue between Russia and the EU countries.

The Gagarin Gymnasium № 40 (Kaliningrad, Russia), which is the IKBFU Resource Centre serves as a base for the practicum. Within the agreement with the school administration, the problem of information and psychological safety of schoolchildren in virtual environments was determined as the most pressing issue for the school authorities. Besides, according to the new Professional Standard of the Teacher, the development and application of modern psychological and pedagogical methods, educational technologies and techniques based on the knowledge of behavioural peculiarities in virtual environment is

determined as an essential skill of a teacher. This fact highlighted the theme of the group research project “Methods of development of schoolchildren’s constructive behaviour in virtual environments”.

5. Research Methods

In the course of the research work, the undergraduates stated the problem, the purpose and the objectives of the research, formulated a hypothesis, analysed the sources of psychological and pedagogical literature and the required legal documentation. Observation and questioning of primary and secondary school learners, parents and gymnasium authorities were used as empirical research methods.

6. Findings

At the very first stage of the research project, the students analyzed a number of dissertation theses, several scientific methodological sources of literature and required legal documentation. As a result, the students defined the virtual environment applying to their research project as virtual media combining various Internet resources predominantly social nets influencing the real sociocultural environment. It contains both the sources and electronic means of delivering information as well as preceptors of this information.

The labour market research at Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (IKBFU) helped in designing a syllabus that truly represents which interactive skills are in demand. MA programs of teacher-training spectrum comprise such programmes as Multicultural Game Design, Russian Orthodox Culture and Cross-Cultural Communication, IT and Cross-platform Technologies in Education and Training, Educational Management. As for the applied research on teacher-training, it deals with applying RIASEC Model to Access Teachers’ Vocational Needs in the Kaliningrad Region (Budarina, 2014).

The undergraduates were placed in the real educational process to observe the schoolchildren and their behaviour under unrestrained circumstances in natural educational environments. This helped the students earn pupils’ confidence to conduct their survey more effectively. The students questioned five groups of respondents:

- Group 1– pupils of primary school (grades 3-4, pupils aged 9 –10);
- Group 2 – junior secondary school (grades 5–8, pupils aged 11–14);
- Group 3 – senior high school (grades 9–11, pupils aged 15–17);
- Group 4 – parents;
- Group 5 – school authorities.

The students excluded junior primary school due to the fact that, as a rule, their Internet access is limited by their parents. As a result, the students defined the percentage of Internet users. It should be noted that they took into account only regular users surfing the entertainment content, chatting in social networking sites, playing online games, etc.

Table 01. The percentage of Internet users

Group	The number of respondents	The number of Internet users	The percentage of users
1	215	139	64,7%

2	250	223	89,2%
3	127	123	96,9%
4	103	80	77,7%
5	44	23	52,3%

The data vividly show that the percentage of Internet users constantly increases depending on the age of respondents, while the interest to Internet grows down among adults, probably due to the lack of time. The most popular social networking sites were defined Vkontakte – 68% of respondents, Odnoklassniki– 48% of respondents, Facebook – 22% of respondents.

An essential index for evaluating the level of influence of virtual environment on schoolchildren can be a gender distribution of Internet users but the survey conducted by IKBFU students showed that 45% of boys and 55% of girls surf the Net on a constant basis which is indicative of equal gender distribution of children operating the Net.

The mentioned above statistic data demonstrate that on average, two-thirds of schoolchildren use Internet on a constant basis and the most part of Internet traffic accounts for social networking sites. In other words, the processes of internetization affects the most part of our young generation and social networking sites are the main source of acquiring information and the main way of virtual pastime.

Such incidence of Internet resources can be hardly controlled. As a result, schoolchildren do not only get necessary information they are searching for, more often they can be misinformed by low grade sources of knowledge. Besides, 87% of parents state that these facts influence transitional mind of schoolchildren leading to deconstructive behaviour and form the called mosaic thinking (perception of world through bright images and simplifying of virtual communication – short headings, abbreviations of phrases, binary evaluation system (“like” or “disregard”)). As a consequence, the youngsters are unable to perceive large quantities of data, focus on them, build cause-and-effect connections relying on facts, analyze, self-reflect and evaluate. All of these lead to the success of misinforming and manipulating.

Thus, based on the preliminary research results, interview with parents and analysis of scientific literature, pedagogical conditions and recommendations for the school administration were formulated in the aspect of constructive behaviour of schoolchildren in virtual environments:

1) Effective psychology and pedagogical diagnostics on a regular basis: a reliable intervention programme must be grounded on practical diagnostic data.

2) Organizing homerooms to inform schoolchildren on risks of social networking sites and to take the correct preventive measures.

3) Including IT literacy classes in the curriculum with a focus on forming inner “information filters” in schoolchildren.

4) Organizing and monitoring extra-curriculum activities in order to shift the focus of schoolchildren from virtual to real world.

Currently, the undergraduates are developing a course schedule for homerooms with a list of training subjects. In cooperation with computer science teachers of Gymnasium № 40, the students are working out a steering document for an elective course on IT literacy. The undergraduates presented the research results at the annual scientific conference of undergraduate and post-graduate students at the Institute of Humanities, IKBFU, Kaliningrad.

7. Conclusion

The results of implementing the integrated MA and PhD programmes allegedly lead to the fact that educationalists' soft skills can be successfully implemented in different cases of training, such as the merge of traditionalist and innovative techniques; the degree of adjustment to the renewed principles of cross- and polycultural education and growing global labour markets; the formation of global intercultural environments.

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