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CIVIC EDUCATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE
CONTEXT OF INFORMATION DIVERSITY

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Abstract

The article discusses various models of civic education of university students, ensuring the social involvement of students in the processes of civil society and the economic development of Russia in the context of information diversity. The authors of the article note the interrelation between the informational and communicative culture of students, their role in civil society and their potential contribution to the economic development of the region. In this regard, the article discusses the most popular among young people channels and sources of information about the most significant civil initiatives in the country, the region, and the university. The authors of the article present the results of a survey among 2nd-4th-year students of Yaroslav the Wise Novgorod State University (Russia). The survey reveals the students' attitudes toward various sources of information about significant events in the country, the region and the university, the degree of confidence in them, and the impact of information on the social involvement of students, their participation in the public life of the university and the region. The survey discloses the role position of students in civil society and their understanding of the possible contribution to the economic development of the region. Based on the survey results, the most effective models of students' civic education are identified. The authors of the article offer some recommendations on how to develop the social involvement of students in the life of civil society that could be useful for university administration and faculty.

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Keywords: Civic education, diversity, information, social involvement, university students.



1. Introduction

Today, the Russian state and society are setting ambitious goals for an economic breakthrough in the coming years, which include increasing economic growth rates above world levels while maintaining economic stability, turning the Russian economy into the fifth economy of the world, and developing and introducing digital technologies into production and people's daily lives. The implementation of these ambitious plans requires not only the efforts of professional economists, but also the broad social involvement of many citizens and the effective work of civil society institutions. At first glance, the relationship between the economy, education, and civil society is not obvious. However, only free people who have not only deep professional knowledge and competencies, but also critical thinking, initiative, active positions in civil society can build a modern economy. The formation of young professionals with civil qualities and social involvement is promoted by the system of civic education at the university, which is implemented in the context of political and ideological pluralism, cultural and informational diversity.

2. Problem Statement

The main problem of the research is to find an answer to the question whether higher education institutions can promote civic education of students by developing information culture of young people that is vital in the context of information diversity, and above all their ability to navigate the flow of information that has political and ideological pressure.

The problem is acute due to the following circumstances:

- modern economy needs highly educated specialists with such civil qualities as an active position in civil society, informational and communicative culture;
- informational diversity significantly influence the professional and personal development of students, the formation of their self-consciousness and civil identity;
- it is necessary to counter the destructive influence of information sources involving young people in extremist and terrorist organizations, as well as in illegal antisocial actions with the pedagogical means.

3. Research Questions

In the course of the research, the following research questions became the focus of attention:

- 3.1. What channels and sources of information about political, economic and cultural events, civil initiatives are the most popular among students?**
- 3.2. Which of these sources have the greatest influence on students' citizenship and worldview?**
- 3.3. Can a university in the process of civic education of students affect their information and communication culture?**

3.4. What models of civic education in the context of informational diversity can be recommended to university administrators and faculty members in the conditions of informational diversity, based on the analysis and objective assessment of the information channels popular among young people?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the most effective models of civic education, ensuring the social involvement of students, their participation in civil initiatives and socially significant projects, based on an objective assessment of the most popular information sources in the youth environment that affect students' personal development and civil position.

The authors of the study suggest that civic education at the university will be effective if the most popular sources and channels of information among students that influence their civil identity, social involvement, and the role position of students in civil society are investigated and identified.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the research is formed with the information and socio-pedagogical approaches. The information approach has significant methodological potential for the study of the information society and a person representing this society in various fields of knowledge. The information approach allows describing the process of managing diversity in terms of the information society (source of information, receiver, information channel, feedback, etc.). In the context of the study, the information approach allows identifying the most optimal means of information about the social activity and civil position of young people, their participation in the public and political life of the country, region, and university. Based on the information approach, the most effective models of students' civic education can be developed and implemented.

The socio-pedagogical approach allows developing theoretical propositions and pedagogical methods with the help of which it is possible to effectively organize the process of civic education of students at the university, considering it as a potential and resource for the personal development of students. The approach makes it possible to comprehensively consider the social involvement of young people, their participation in creation of a civil society as a significant social and pedagogical phenomenon. At the individual and interpersonal levels, the approach addresses the problems of recognizing and maintaining a positive civil identity, developing students' personal qualities, organizational, empathic, and communication skills that allow university graduates to actively participate in the public and political life of the country.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following methods were used: theoretical analysis of philosophical, economic, and sociological literature on research issues; analysis of current experience of schools and universities in the field of civic education; modeling; observation; survey method; methods of mathematical data processing, generalization of the results of empirical research.

6. Findings

Progress in the economic development of Russia directly depends on the quality of training professionals at the university, their civil qualities, social involvement, and the degree of development of civil society institutions. Only a person with high moral ideals, possessing a sense of self-esteem, independence, individuality, critical thinking, respecting the rights and freedoms of other citizens, and with strict observance of the laws, is able to make breakthroughs both in the economic sphere and in social development. An important role in the education of such a person is played by civil society, which can be considered as a cultural form of a social system, as the highest known manifestation of the political, legal, and economic culture of society.

To form an active position in society for the future professional is the mission of civic education of students, which in modern universities is carried out in conditions of political pluralism and informational diversity. Civic education is a socially-oriented system of lifelong learning and education, aimed at developing students' civil qualities and social involvement based on new knowledge, skills and values necessary for the individual to solve vital problems, protect their rights and interests, and interests and other people's rights (Sungurov, 2003). According to Voskresenskaya (2005), the term "civil qualities" has undergone some evolution over the past two decades. At the beginning, the world democratic community spoke about the development of the "values" of democracy, then, the term democratic "attitudes" came into usage. Now scientists from different countries are increasingly talking about "dispositions" or "predispositions" that promote the development of the desire to maintain and develop democracy. This term was discussed in detail by Canadian educators Sears and Hughes (1996), whose study clearly shows the tendency to associate civic education with moral education. At the same time, much attention is paid to civil and moral qualities, as well as their interrelations.

Social involvement implies the active participation of students in socially significant activities, which gives the students the opportunity to realize the importance of their influence on the situation in civil society and understand the need to use their right to influence this situation. From the point of view of social psychology, involvement is a complex phenomenon, in which three main aspects can be distinguished: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Involvement can be described as a multidimensional motivational concept, which reflects the simultaneous contribution of physical, mental and emotional energy of a person in the process of carrying out activities that are significant to him/her (Kolesnichenko, Radicova, & Sutyagin, 2017).

Currently, social inclusion of young people is characterized by a focus on specific issues. Disappointment in traditional political processes encourages many young people to focus on solving individual problems that directly affect their interests. Such problems include finding one's place on the labor market, solving the problems of transportation, environmental pollution, and garbage collection, availability of sports facilities and youth-friendly infrastructure, reducing poverty, respecting human rights, and eliminating crime. Social involvement implies the development of students' leadership qualities, moral and legal consciousness, knowledge of the basic institutions of civil society, necessary for successful professional personal development in the context of diversity.

Scientific dictionaries interpret diversity as a manifestation of something uniform in its essence in various forms (Evgenieva, 1999). Diversity exists in any society, regardless of its cultural and historical features, social class structure, government, and social system.

In regard to social appraisal of diversity in different historical periods, the treatment of diversity by society was defined by the tendencies of humanization and democratization, on the one hand, and centralization and standardization, on the other hand. In the course of the first tendency, diversity is considered a positive phenomenon, a resource of social development, mutual enrichment of cultures. In the course of the second tendency, the emphasis is put on danger of diversity for social stability and aspiration of the society to limit diversity by definite legal and moral-ethic frames. The influence of these tendencies affects distinctly the development of the inner environment and culture of educational organizations (Pevzner, Sherayzina, Ushanova, Petryakov, & Donina, 2017).

The term “information diversity” in the present study refers to a set of information sources and channels that allow a person to receive diverse, significant in scope, various and sometimes alternative information and judgments about the world, important political, economic and cultural events taking place in the country and the region. These sources affect the civic identity of young people; they shape their worldview and moral values. In our opinion, the concept of information diversity includes both the information files themselves, containing information used by a person, sources and channels for obtaining this information, and the multiplicity of ways to process information to be used by individuals and social groups in different areas of life, including education.

From a pedagogical point of view, it is important to take into account the fact that information diversity, like any other kind of diversity, is a controversial phenomenon. As noted by a number of authors (A. N. Iljina, R. V. Arzumanyan, V. I. Artyukh, A. M. Bagautdinova, N. A. Brusnitsyna, A. Mirzaev, and others), along with positive characteristics, informational diversity contains destructive potential (Mirzaev, 2017). The negative characteristics of information diversity include the destructive influence on the consciousness and the emerging worldview of young people, which could hinder the identity of their personality; presence of multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon and events, which often contradict each other and do not provide value bases for the right of choice; use of information for ideological and manipulative purposes.

The modern information environment contains objective information and disinformation, alternative reality and virtual phantoms, which are dangerous for the development of the civil identity of young people. It is difficult for a young person today to estimate the flow of information, much of which distorts reality, provides unverified facts and information, and involves young people in illegal actions aimed at disintegration of society. Uncontrolled diversity, inaccuracy or fragmentation of information result in deformation of the public consciousness of young people, in their alienation from civil society institutions, exclusion from participation in socially significant activities, and transformation of moral values (Pevzner, Sheraizina, Donina, Petryakov, & Aleksandrova, 2017). On this basis, the management of informational diversity is an important pedagogical problem, which the civic education system could solve at the university.

In accordance with the problem posed, the authors of the article conducted a study aimed to identify which sources of information about political, economic and cultural events, civil initiatives are

used by students, what their information preferences are, how the information obtained is used for students' participation in socially significant activities, the work of civil society institutions. An objective assessment of information sources most demanded by students can contribute to the development and implementation of the most effective systems of civic education at the university.

In order to identify the influence of various sources of information on the formation of citizen personality of students, the authors of the article conducted a survey among 2nd-4th-year students majoring in various fields at Yaroslav the Wise Novgorod State University (Russia).

The questionnaire contained questions about the attitude of young people to information sources, about their trust in them and their popularity, frequency of use, the impact of information on social inclusion and the role position of students in civil society. There were six sets of questions: on personal data and the area of students' interests; on the purpose of obtaining information; on types and forms of information, channels and sources; on information about political, economic and cultural events in the country and the region; on information about the most significant events in the public life of the university. 200 students belonging to age group from 18 to 20 took part in the survey.

The survey results showed that the respondents display diverse interests. Online communication is of most interest, it was indicated by 187 respondents (93.5%), and another important area of interest is sports noted by 147 respondents (73.5%). Interest to leisure and entertainment was expressed by 98 people (49%). 69 respondents are interested in cooking, art and tourism (34.5%); slightly less number of respondents (29%) expressed interest in various sciences. 146 people (73%) are interested in socio-economic and political events in the country and abroad. The respondents are least interested in philosophy - 23 people (11.5%) and religion - 32 people (16%).

To determine the possibilities of managing information diversity, it was considered necessary to determine the purpose of receiving information by respondents. As the survey results showed, the majority of respondents, namely, 146 people (73%) are looking for information in order to keep abreast of political, economic and cultural events taking place in the country and abroad. 54 people (27%) indicated the aim of expanding the range of knowledge and competences in the social sciences.

According to the survey, the majority of respondents is interested in political, economic and cultural events taking place in Russia and abroad. Out of these, 43% give preference to cultural events, 31% - to political events, and 26% - to economic events. The majority of respondents receives information about these events from the Internet (97%), the second place is taken by the media (58%), the third place is given to the university teachers, friends, and acquaintances (47%). The least demanded sources of information are advertising/promotion materials and printed sources. A significant part of respondents does not comment on information about significant events, 23% do it seldom, only 4% of students surveyed leave their comments quite often. 12% of the students surveyed belong to parties and public organizations, out of them, the majority prefers youth public organizations (89%). 54% of the respondents participate in elections held in Russia at federal, regional and municipal levels. The forms of such participation are different: 85% - voting, work at election commissions - 7%, work at political parties' headquarters - 3%, election events - 5%. Almost all respondents (94%) envision their contribution to the economic development of the region, the absolute majority associates it with the successful mastering of a future profession, the practical value of their diploma, as well as the development of

information and digital technologies. 26% of students participate in strategic sessions, innovative projects, and youth initiatives. The smallest number of 3% of respondents participates in the discussion of programs for the socio-economic development of the region.

The final part of the questionnaire was related to the participation of students in the public life of the university, their role in public life, as well as sources of information about various events held at the university. The study showed that the majority of respondents participate in the public life of the university to some extent (76%), only 24% are not engaged in any public activities. The most frequently mentioned in the students' answers are leisure, cultural and sports activities, 26% carry out certain duties. Approximately the same number of students - 38% - participate in government bodies, volunteer movements, charitable and socio-political events. Apparently, these are the answers of students who belong to a definite group of activists. The survey showed a wide range of role positions that students occupy in the public life of the university. Thus, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of students act as facilitators, emotional leaders, and ideological encouragers. This number correlates with the data obtained regarding the forms of participation of students in the public activities of the university. Unfortunately, a significant proportion of respondents prefer the passive role of the performer or observer, which is about 47%. A small number of students act as constructive critics. The most popular sources of information about various events held at the university are a university website, teachers-facilitators, representatives of student government bodies, heads of departments, and professors. At the same time, the second place is taken by social networks, the third – by the university newspaper, the fourth – by friends and acquaintances.

According to the survey, approximately 40% of respondents have well-formed civil qualities and social involvement, most of them are interested in events taking place in the country and the region, and less than half are directly involved in the political and public life of the country and the region. About a third of respondents are actively involved in the socially significant activities of the university, showing leadership skills. Unfortunately, about half of the students surveyed prefer the role of a passive observer and performer. The most popular channels and sources of information about events taking place in our country and abroad are the Internet, the media, and university professors. The least popular are promotional products and print sources. The most popular channels of information about events held at the university mentioned by students are the university website, university professors and representatives of student government.

7. Conclusion

The study showed that information diversity reflects a wide palette of information resources and channels for obtaining information about the most significant events in the political, economic and cultural life of the country, as well as the degree of influence of this information on the formation of civil self-awareness and social involvement of students. An objective assessment of information sources and the real participation of students in the socio-political life of the country and socially significant activities at the university is the research base for finding the most optimal models of civic education.

The process of civic education at a higher education institution involves the solution of several problems. First, it is the professional and social training of students for an active role-playing position in

civil society, and second, it is the creation of a democratically organized space at the university, allowing students to show their civil qualities and acquire various types of social and educational experience. In general, this experience should correspond to four types of activity of individuals in civil society: social interaction, decision-making, critical thinking and communication in diversity. Preparing students for such activities requires the development of a high level of information and communication culture, which allows young people to critically analyze practically unguided information streams, to form their own position as a citizen, to resist disinformation, manipulation and other negative phenomena.

The successful solution of the tasks of civic education is facilitated by the analysis and objective assessment of the most popular among young people sources of information which provide information about the political, economic and cultural life of the country, civil initiatives, the most significant events held at the university. An objective assessment of these sources is necessary to select the most optimal models of civic education for students.

Considering the results of the study, it is possible to recommend to the university administrators and teachers to use cognitive and institutional models of civic education, each of which has a set of specific pedagogical means of educating a citizen. Education for democracy takes place primarily in the framework of the cognitive model, which, in its turn, is divided into subject-oriented (for example, history and cultural studies) and interdisciplinary model (synthesis of sociological and psychological-pedagogical sciences).

As part of the cognitive model, students form a system of knowledge about the essence of civil society, the main activities of its institutions, traditions and national specifics of democracy in various countries. Studying historical material, students come to understand that the problems and difficulties of forming a civil society in Russia are primarily due to the historical conditions and the nature of the reforms being carried out in the country. In contrast to Western democracy, which grew from below, civil society in Russia initiated from above was rather a mobilization model, which first had to be created following the patterns of Western models and, secondly, had to be filled with democratic content. In the course of educational and research activities, students of Russian universities are looking for an answer to the main question: why did the social, relatively independent from the state, environment which was created in Russia at the turn of the 1980 – 1990s give birth to small islands of civil society which so far have not reached the level of holistic system?

Within the framework of the institutional model, a democratic social environment is being created at educational institutions. In other words, the educational institution itself should become a prototype of a free democratic society and embody its main features. Educational institutions should use the principles of democratic pedagogy both in the organization of the educational process and their own lives and in interaction with the authorities, business and the local community as a whole.

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