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## EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS: FORMATION OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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## *Abstract*

The last few years have shown us a significant leap in the development of the linguistic culture of the individual, due in large part to the advancement of new forms of communication in virtual reality. Not the least role in these processes is the effect of self-learning and the teaching of participants in various social networks, resulting in the emergence of new models of effective online learning. In this respect, social networks such as VKontakte, Facebook, etc., demonstrate a rapid development in the field of satisfying the user's demand for. There is a certain tendency, when entertainment, the game turns into a useful process from the point of view of personal growth, cheerful communication with friends in virtual reality grows into group work on the solution of some problem. There is a formation of new communicative competence, both in the instrumental plan (changing the technology of information transfer: new vocabulary, new symbols, combination of different information transmission channels, etc.), as well as in content (changing the purpose and tasks of communication, shifting the authorship of the text, Joint statements, etc.). We believe that the study of this communicative competence, including from the point of view of its didactic capabilities, will contribute to a more harmonious development of the communicative environment of virtual reality, a reduction in the number of conflict situations and an increase in the success of speech utterances.

## 1. Introduction

Recently, there have been a number of rapid changes in Russian higher professional education. New challenges and trends are here to stay: the disparity between acquired education and the demand of labour market, the transformation of educational system, the impact of globalization processes, etc. All these factors require from the participants of educational process to use the latest technologies of writing educational programs. A variety of factors must be taken into account: the changes in the educational market and in Russian legislation, the employer's demands, the interests of potential consumers of educational services and modern trends in higher education around the world.

## 2. Problem Statement

Currently, we can note a significant increase in interests in aspects of the influence of mobile technologies on the socio-cultural development our society (Zagidullina, 2016). The same applies to social networks such as VKontakte, Facebook, etc., which demonstrate a rapid development in the field of satisfying the user's demand for knowledge (not only about specific user groups, such as "I love Russian language!", but also about the official learning communities that perform a specific educational task, for example, VK University). Recently, in addition to mentioned above VKUniversity, there have been quite a number of different virtual educational projects, which are directly or predominantly perform an educational function. The educational phenomenon of social networks is of our undeniable interest, because the very form of online communication (as processes of generating and translating knowledge) and the distribution of the roles of a teacher and a student, is different from online education or Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), etc.

## 3. Research Questions

VKontakte (ВКонтакте, meaning InContact; vk.com) or VK for short is one of the most popular social networks according to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (RPOEC) in 2015-2016. VK has a huge amount of features and one the most important of them is the ability to use this online platform for educational purposes, e.g. VK University (vk.com/vku), where you can create an educational course of your own. Moreover, there is a real practical experience of the universities using social networks for education. For example, in Chelyabinsk State University (or CSU for short) VK is used by both teachers and students for informal communication and also for exchanging information related to homework assignments (Selyutin et al., 2016).

Here is list of public groups in VK that are connected with the university:

"ПризнавашкиЧелГУ" (meaning Confessions CSU) is a group page, where you can anonymously share whatever thoughts you have concerning the university. You just need to make a post and wait a little till the administrator of the group approves it for posting (these pre-moderation is used to prevent advertising and spam). This helps to remove social and mental tensions, to facilitate adaptation of a student for university environment.

"AngryCSU" is an antithesis of the previous group, here you're expected to express negative opinion, while "Признавашки" is oriented towards positive communication.

"ИИТЧелГУ – помощьиобщение" (meaning Institute of IT CSU – Assistance and communication) is an example of a faculty group that aims at providing advice for students, primarily freshmen.

Virtual groups, that are created during the studying years, are an accurate reflection of academic groups and students' communities and are used to complement lessons with some form of interaction between students and teachers (Noskova, 2014). "This combination is helpful for students and teachers because of the organization of interaction, both in realization of student projects and in learning self-education and organizational skills" (Noskova, 2014, p. 55).

## 4. Purpose of the Study

First of all, there are two main ways to shape the structure of information field:

1) **public page** (also can be called an official page or a public), where the audience subscribes for the updates of a page;

2) **group**. Groups differentiate a bit from public pages, people in a group are called group members, not subscribers (for details on the typology of projects see the article by Morozova (2014).

When groups are based on already existing academic groups of higher education institutions, the educational process transfers to the virtual environment. Group members can use group chat to exchange information.

**Table 01.** For example:

| VKgroupdialogue |
|---|
| **User 1.** What does "distribute Zoshchenko'stexts" mean than? |
| Distribute as spliting texts among the groupmates |
| **User 2.** right |
| We already splitted them |
| Weneedtochoose one story by Zoshchenko and answer the questions in paragraph 2. |
| and write out 5-6 objects of satire from Golden calf |
| **User 1.** OK, thanks Dasha) |

This form of communication is similar to chat, except the messaging takes place in real time. Real time virtual communication is as close as possible to real one. This is because your interlocutor doesn't have time to think through the whole phrase, as you can do on a forum or on the e-mail, which resembles "live" communication.

Students in the groups touch upon general educational issues and help develop skills that require particular attention, because these pages are educational site for students and perform educational function.

**Table 02.** Groups can perform information sharing function, e.g. how to carry out home assignments:

| VKgroupdialogue |
|---|
| **User 1.** Guys, the second assignment is confusing |
| we need to pick syllabus on literature. |
| from the list she proposed? |
| but they aren't distributed between classes |
| **User 2.** Look for syllabus yourself |
| **User 1.** Very well |
| thank you |

**Table 03.** Or perform a control function of the task performance:

| VKgroupdialogue |
|---|
| **User 1.** We have to rewrite this? |
| **User 2.** I think so |
| there are punctuation marks and letters missed |
| **User 1.** Ok |
| I have a comma in front of "and all the loved ones are dead". |
| **User 2.** Yes, thanks) |
| you're right |

**Table 04.** Or perform a function of explaining incomprehensible task

| VKgroupdialogue |
|---|
| **User 1.** Can anybody explain the difference between the link in brackets and the links below the bar? |
| **User 2.** In brackets it's a reference to a quote, to the author, and to the name of a book in a short version, it's duplicated in bibliography |
| and the link at bottom is usually a comment or an explanation of terms and stuff |
| **User 1.** Thanks) |

Using group in the educational process enables students to form professional communicative competencies. As it was mentioned earlier, a group has a mechanism for self-study and co-training. Students can exchange the information with each other. Moreover, the controlling party isn't a teacher, but one of the students or the entire group. Since our article covers groups that are formed based on real academic groups, the members of VK groups are still studying at the university.

The estimated (perhaps even obligatory) result of getting higher education is the formation of specific professional competences. In this case, a group can implement the task (though it's not an openly flaunted one), which is to help students to form certain competences.

## 5. Research Methods

To confirm this assumption, we worked together with the students of philological faculty and prepared a questionnaire using GoogleForms.

Here are some of the questions: *Does your academic group have a page on the social network VKontakte (hereinafter referred to as VK)? Does your group page/group chat help you with the studying? Do you and your groupmates exchange learning materials, tasks, and solutions in your group on VK? How often does the advice of your groupmates help you when you do a challenging task?*

We sent our questionnaire to 100 random students from Chelyabinsk State University and explained that the questionnaire is intended to assess the impact of communicative processes, which occur in the virtual academic groups on VKontakte, on the educational process.

The results showed that 96.2% of the respondents interact with their groupmates through a group chat, which works a virtual version of the academic group. 84.6% of respondents regularly exchange materials that help with challenging tasks and home assignments. 96.2% of students believe that the having a virtual academic group on VK network is important and conduct to a comfortable learning process. We can see that the educational environment of the university is greatly expanding towards virtualization and, at some extent, becomes a network environment, inventing new rules for communication in the telecommunications space.

## 6. Findings

This applies in particular to the communicative competences, which, as stated the Federal Educational Standard, in the vast majority of training courses, from 01.03.01 Mathematics to 54.03.04 Restoration, have the same similar wording: "The ability to communicate orally and in writing in Russian and in foreign languages to meet the challenges of interpersonal and intercultural interaction (OK-5)" (HTTP://FGOSVO.RU/FGOSVO/92/91/4). In some cases, it may change the number (for example, OK-3 or OK-6, but this is not important for us in this case). In the context of the global development of electronic means of communication, such competencies as fluency in Russian, the ability to create texts in Russian, etc., requires rethinking (Selyutin et al., 2017). The genre of modern electronic communication (e-mail, social networks, blogs, forums, etc.) suggests that to form such competencies a new approach should be developed (theoretical, methodical, instrumental).

Besides, stable interpersonal and, moreover, intercultural interaction, which are essential for the occurrence and operation of a group (Chewning & Montemurro, 2016), occur predominantly in written Russian language. That's why a question a question is bound to arise: Does a social group really contribute to generation, transfer and usage of new knowledge? Observing how a group exchange content on VK group chat showed that students use group mainly to solve problems that arise during the educational process. For example, as we discussed before, to explain and master new knowledge.

## 7. Conclusion

In this environment, new technologies help students to accomplish extracurricular self-study activities. The technologies give rise to new models of information and communication processes (processes of generation, transfer and usage of knowledge), complementing and enriching the interaction in classroom. This environment help to maintain the educational demand of young people, actualizing the communities for sharing knowledge and values (Feschenko, 2010). And exactly in this environment a

new linguistic personality begins to emerge, with its own communicative needs and new forms of education.

## Acknowledgments

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