

# Online Survey Based Analysis of the Level of Information Development in Social Sciences` Education

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## ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the results of an online survey of university professors on integrating IT-methods in the study process as well as future prospects of implementation of IT-methods in Russia's Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

## Keywords

Online survey, IT-methods, Higher Educational Institutions, informational-communicative competence of the instructors

The process of integration of Russia into the global informational and educational sphere is followed by the significant changes in the pedagogical theory and practice. It triggers the necessity of changing the methodology, which should respond to the modern technological opportunities. As a result of implementation of IT in the education system, the studying process has received a new impetus, becoming more dynamic, flexible and individually-oriented. Modern e-libraries, multimedia technologies and distance learning are considered to be an integral part of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Providing an opportunity for self-study work, they are effective means of upgrading academics' professional skills. At the Educational World Forum (2012) the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, pointed out that "technologies can be a powerful instrument for education and, at the same time, they should be integrated reasonably into the educational process as well as accompanied by the new forms of learning" [1, p.11].

Nowadays the principal direction of modernization of the Russian educational system lies in the implementation of its new quality. It is impossible to achieve without integration in the educational process modern technological means of work with information, in other words, without the global informatization of the Russian educational sphere. In this respect, another aspect arises – the issue of informational-communicative competence of the instructors at the higher educational level and their degree of preparation for achieving new goals. The present survey aims at obtaining the opinions of the instructors on the question of the new informational technologies in education.

In regard to this, we would like to observe whether online methods are effectively used by the academics in regional HEIs and whether the information technology has become a common teaching method for every academic. Thus, Voronezh State University has conducted an online survey involving 50 professors of the Faculty of International Relations and the Faculty of Philosophy and Psychology. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions focusing on the main issues of using IT in the learning process as well as

future prospects of implementation of IT-methods in Russia's HEIs.

One of the principal objectives was to find out the teachers' attitude towards the integration of modern technology as well as new forms and methods in the teaching process. It was especially important to know the attitude to the online methods, which has lately been of special interest to Russian HEIs.

The survey results showed that 69% of academics would like to combine reasonably traditional and distance learning methods. 15% are convinced that distance learning is an important means of earning money by HEIs. Some respondents (1%) believe that it gives a lot of opportunities to upgrade the educational level of a great number of people whereas others (1%) consider that "it should have a status of supplementary education".

The survey results confirmed that all the academics involved in the survey did use IT, though in different ways. First of all, it is multimedia facilities as well as software programs for creating and delivering materials. The most popular of these is Power Point, used to deliver a visual image of textual and graphic information. Only 17% of respondents use social network and 15% use online services for learning.

In regard to this problem, we inevitably encounter a vital issue: when or at which stage it will be really efficient to use IT. Predictably, the opinions are divided on this issue. 23% of the respondents consider the use of IT the most important part of pre-class work. Another 20% believe that it is important for class communication with students outside the class as well as for self-study work. 17% of teachers find it useful for circulating teaching materials, 10% find it effective for assessment work and another 10% - for storing learning materials. 41% of the respondents use IT only for preparation for class work, 29% use it at all stages of learning process and 6% use IT for assessment only.

In regard to implementation of IT in the educational process, we must definitely mention the Moodle platform, which is the most common system used in distance learning and for the control of learning process in Russian and Western HEIs. Voronezh State University has been using this learning platform since 2006, and since 2012 Moodle has been actively implemented in the learning process. However, today many academics still encounter some difficulties while using it.

The survey showed that all the academics uploaded their course programs on the virtual educational environment platform moodle.vsu.ru. 47% of the academics surveyed uploaded their teaching materials, whereas 53% are in the process of doing that. As for the advantages of Moodle,

opinions are quite different: 23% of the respondents pointed out to the opportunity for students to have a continuous access to the course resources; 19% of academics favour the opportunity to use the platform free of charge; another 19% find it useful to create different testing assignments; another 19% see it as an opportunity to communicate with students. 8% of the teaching staff believe it is a good opportunity to fill their courses with reference to different websites, files, etc, i.e., the opportunity for individual study plan. Only 4% see an opportunity to create and store students' portfolios (with their academic performance record, feedback and forum messages).

Naturally, as any other technical development, this system has a number of flaws. 33% of the respondents admitted that when they started to use Moodle they encountered many difficulties uploading materials. Another 33% pointed out to the fact that students are less motivated to attend lectures if lecture materials are displayed on the platform. 17% mentioned that using the platform produced a depreciating effect on the teacher's role in students' personality formation. 8% said that academics are becoming increasingly busier since they have to monitor the online resource regularly, whereas another 8% found this platform inefficient for group work.

As for the main reasons for Moodle's failure to provide efficiency of the study process, 32% of the respondents mentioned the lack of clear instructions for operating the platform. 16% chose the following answers:

1. A huge number of teaching hours;
2. excessive online communication makes students less motivated to attend classes;
3. unwilling to provide free access to course programs.

11% of the respondents said that the use of the platform implies a regular update of course contents, which is, in turn, an extra load for academics.

Last but not least is the problem of factors, enhancing the enthusiastic use of IT in educational process. 50% of the respondents appreciated the improvement of the department facilities and recourses; 20% - the reduction of classroom teaching hours due to the increase in hours for students' self-study work, 15% pointed out to the improvement of IT skills and another 15% mentioned financial incentives for academics so as to encourage them to use new teaching methods.

The survey was aimed not only at identifying the "weak" points of implementing IT features in the teaching process, but also at finding out what can fasten this process and improve its quality.

Let's now recap the main weak points that have been found out after conducting this survey:

1. Active use of Power Point prevents teachers to employ alternative online resources.
2. IT facilities are commonly used while preparing for classes and quite rarely for students' assessment.
3. Teaching staff does not demonstrate enthusiasm about using distance learning.
4. Moodle is not widely used by academics while working with students.

The main reasons why IT is not actively implemented can be divided into two sets.

First, many problems arise at early stages of a course design on the platform basis. There is also an increase in the academics' load as the result of regular monitoring of this online resource.

The second set of issues is as follows: in the context of demographic crisis, we can observe not only a decrease in the number of applicants, but also a low level of their pre-course training. Hence, the risk that students may not be motivated enough to attend lectures especially now that the lecture materials are posted on the platform. For this reason, academics are not enthusiastic to post their courses and learning materials for free access. Lack of motivation for integration of innovative educational technologies among the instructors, in our opinion, represents a destructive factor, which is difficult to eliminate.

This leads us to the question of what can encourage academics to use IT in HEIs more actively. As we see it, first of all, it is the improvement of department teaching facilities, the increase in a number of multimedia classrooms, the raise in teacher's IT awareness, the increase in students' self-study work, opportunity to deliver workshops on the implementation of IT in the educational process. Also it is an opportunity to get training and consultancy from the VSU E-Educational Technology Centre, the encouragement of the staff to use new forms and methods of teaching as this involves more active faculty participation in the international projects sponsored by foreign funds and organizations, dealing with distance learning.

In our opinion, while even the most passive student group can be transformed into a participating one by an involving presentation of the material related to their specialization, the motivation of the instructors can be increased only by the decisions on the administrative level.

The problem of modernization of the educational sphere is placed on the governmental level. In December 2014, the concept of the federal target program of the development of the educational sphere for 2016-2020 was approved [2]. It is oriented at the most problematic aspects of the educational system that in the close future may negatively affect the modernization processes developing in the frames of the Program 2011-2015. In connection to this, there has been a reinforcement of the requirements for the instructors in respect to the new professional standards and upgraded sociocultural educational system as a consequence of the rapid development of science and technology, as well as increase in the necessity in the new instructors capable of achieving the goals in the modernization of the educational system on various levels.

Such surveys about the level of informatization, the problems connected with the implementation of the new methods in the educational system among the instructors will help the administrative body of the universities efficiently and appropriately react to the demands of updating the social sciences education system in particular as well as the society as a whole.

## REFERENCES

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