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**PARENTING SUPPORT IN THE INFORMATION AGE –  
THE MESSAGE THAT UNITES**

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***Abstract***

The article touches upon the problem of a small percentage of parents involved in information-educational environment. The paper analyzes the guidelines of family and education policy in the information age in the Russian national context. The study revealed that the current vectors of the development facilitate parenting support, expand opportunities for the creation of modern digital toolkits oriented towards the improvement of parental competences. At regional level, the existing initiatives on the integration of digital technologies into educational environment are still insufficient to develop stable interaction forms within the digital community of educators and parents for children’s education. The study discusses the problems concerning the target support of parents from different generations to improve their parental competences, and the negative impact on the involvement of families in regional information-educational environment. The authors problematize the pedagogical dimension of digital toolkits needed for parents of preschool and schoolchildren considering its correlation with regional and national education context in different socio- and lingua-cultures, and the existing experience of parenting support in different countries. The study analyzes the productive digital expertise of French regional Networks for Parenting Support and national strategies in this sphere. Analysis outcomes served as a scientific platform for generating and developing research hypotheses oriented towards the interaction in digital educational environment, the exchange of ideas and digital techniques, and contribute to the integration of all actors in the sphere of family, parenting and childhood to create effective parenting support in the information age.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the information age digital technologies have become part and parcel of educational environment in different socio- and lingua-cultures. They have opened up new opportunities for involvement, participation and, what is most important, unification of family and school for children's education and upbringing through the actualizing of parenting support problem. With this aim, education communities develop digital resources and services oriented towards the improvement of parental competences and/or the formation of new ones. Nevertheless, numerous international and national studies (UNESCO, 2015, 2016; Child Protection. Rethinking the Role of Parents?, 2016; Docebo, 2016; Newzoo, 2016; Orekhova, Danilova, & Shajdenko, 2018) bear witness that the parent participation rate in the process of digital changes and innovations in educational environment is still insignificant. Researchers explain parents' lag in ICT acquisition by various factors (social, cultural, academic and emotional) that influence the particular digital context of parenting support in the local community.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The need for mutual enrichment and widening of educational discourse in the sphere of family, parenting and school in different socio- and lingua-cultures determines the search for a modern and effective toolkit (including digital services and resources) that directly or indirectly promotes the improvement of parental competences in educational environment of the information age.

This paper is a logical extension of the authors' study oriented towards the development of competent parenting in the regional educational environment. The evaluation of the existing digital tools (services and resources) designed and accessible for parents in different socio- and lingua-cultures is one of the stages of scientific search on the problem mentioned above.

## **3. Research Questions**

focusing on three contexts enable us

- to determine priority guidelines in domestic national context of family and education policy oriented towards parenting support in educational environment of the information age;
- to describe the regional landscape of digital parenting support developed by the education system in a particular part of the country – in Tula region – by revealing a modern digital toolkit (services and resources) and to identify the existing problem of its use in the local education community;
- to assess the efficacy of popular digital services and resources oriented towards parental competences development which are used abroad in the leading practices of parenting support with the aim of their possible implementation in Russian regional educational environment.

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

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the existing experience of parenting support in digital educational environment of a particular territory – in Tula region, and to identify the prospects of the

implementation of positive foreign practices of parental competences development that can enrich this activity in the local education community.

## 5. Research Methods

– analytical methods: the selection and systematization of scientific concepts and statistical data, the analysis of authentic sources, the integration of problems and prospects of parenting support in digital educational environment at national, regional and European levels;

–the methods of concrete sociological research: the analysis of normative and legal documentation and statistical data of Tula region; questionnaire survey and interviews, quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the collected information;

– implicit comparison: the identification of positive trends of remote parent support in leading foreign practices oriented towards competent parenting and the possibilities of their development in Russia.

## 6. Findings

National context. Parents in Russia are education services consumers, acting as customers in regional pre-school and school education systems (Federal'nyj zakon ot 29.12.2012 N 273-FZ, 2012). Their responsibility has significantly grown in modern educational environment and has caused the extension of their parental competences not only in the sphere of children's education and upbringing but also in their own parental development. The state is ready to support this contemporary parenting by making the effort "to create the conditions for parent education and counselling on the questions of family upbringing ...for the improvement of social, communicative and pedagogical competence of parents" (Development strategy of upbringing in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025. Decree of the Russian Government dated 29 May 2015 № 996-p, 2015).

We suppose that the recent Executive Order "On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Russian Federation through to 2024" issued on May 7, 2018 (Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 07.05.2018 N 204, 2018) directly reflects the tasks of each participant involved in education environment – an educator, a parent, a child. The titles of sub-projects "Contemporary School", "Digital Education Environment", "Contemporary Parents", "Teacher of the Future", "New Opportunities for Everyone" indicate the target audience and orient the development of each actor under the conditions where digital technologies add a new dimension to education and provide everyone with the opportunity to be involved in learning not only faster but also differently. This fact convinces us that educators, students and parents, all together, should make every effort to learn and be ready to live and work in a rapidly changing and information-oriented world. In this world everyone's competences expressed in real actions become a peculiar kind of social demand and take the form of a positive and competent challenge directed towards personal and professional development of a man.

Despite the existing national and regional initiatives oriented towards the integration of digital technologies into educational environment, parenting support based on them is still insufficient in order that the digital community of educators and parents acquires stable interaction forms in the sphere of

collaborative upbringing and scholarization of children. This trend represents the problem field in national and regional education systems in different socio- and lingua-cultures. It is witnessed by domestic and foreign research (Gascon, Beaudoin, & Voyer, 2014; Child and childhood: variable definition of the concepts and its relation to education, 2016; Shireen, 2017; Peteghem, 2018), which define it as insufficiently studied, motivating toward scientific search, methodological renewal, the intensification of interdisciplinary approaches with the aim of mutual enrichment and widening of educational discourse in the sphere of family, parenting and school.

Regional context. In the context of this study, we focus on the parenting support provided by the education system in Tula region that develops educational environment according to the priority guidelines of family and education policy of our country, and with understanding that the education mission is the responsibility of parents and family. The education system of Tula region is oriented towards the protection and retention of regional family identity. Taking into account regional specificity arising from the configuration of the education centers that combine pre-school and school educational establishments, parenting support in the region becomes an urgent socio-educational issue. It orients all actors of upbringing and education towards interaction with the use modern digital tools (services and resources) in both structural component and content of this process in the sphere of family, parenting and childhood.

In Tula region, the initiatives on the integration of digital services and resources into education sphere focus on the development of regional information and communication environment. We revealed three directions oriented towards digital parenting support in the region and open for families with children. The first direction is represented by the information system of the management of education sphere in Tula region (RIS USO TO) created through the interdepartmental interaction of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Informatization, Communication and Open Governance. The orientation of the system towards parenting support reflects in providing of digital services for parents in two modules. Module 1 “E-services. Education” is designed for accepting applications on the portal of public services, for registration and enrollment of children in educational establishments (schools and kindergartens); Module 2 “Web City. Education” is developed for the implementation of information processes in all kinds of educational organizations (schools, kindergartens, additional education establishments) (Regional'naya informacionnaya sistema upravleniya sferoj obrazovaniya Tul'skoj oblasti, 2019).

The second direction includes the development of educational establishments' web sites as a digital toolkit that serves the information and communication environment of the educational organizations and makes it accessible and open for all actors of children's upbringing and education.

The specificity of the third direction of parenting support arises from the variety of the projects and activities initiated by the members of local education community – educators, parents, students and other subjects of education and upbringing. The existing initiatives on the organization of digital interaction or the involvement of all people who are interested in it are, no doubt, important and useful, as they are oriented towards and facilitate the integration in digital environment for the development of parental competences that enable parents to become the actors of regional educational community.

What is parenting digital support and how sufficient it is in the context of parental competences development, we can judge on the problems families with children still face nowadays. First of all, it is digital inequality among adults, including mothers, fathers (legal representatives), grandparents who are responsible for children's socialization and education. The analysis of the data of family members participated in the questionnaire survey showed that the active users of the module "E-services. Education" (75% of respondents) are the parents of future first-graders. For enrolling children in the first grade, they submitted an electronic application on the web portal of public services. Nevertheless, due to limited information literacy, 25% of adults, including mothers, fathers, grandparents, needed help from a technical professional of the school. However, we consider these indicators to be fairly decent as in 2017 Tula region citizens who used an electronic format to receive public services made up 75% of respondents, and the region was ranked ninth in Russia (Internet: the percentage of residents using State e-services, 2017).

The module "Web City. Education" is less popular with parents; only 25% of them consider it the main source of information about children's performance and use it once or twice a week. At the same time, 20% of parents use the module for the access to the electronic class grade book on a daily basis. 55% of survey participants visit "Web City. Education" less than once a week (once or twice a month) to find information about school activities and its education mission preferring school websites. Using the term "digital inequality", we mean two types of adults, including mothers, fathers, legal representatives, grandparents involved in children's education and upbringing. It is worth mentioning that the problem of digital inequality based on the difference between them is attributable not to the lack of digital devices but to intergenerational divide.

On the one hand, we observe millennial parents called Generation Y (1985-2005) who make up the majority of new parents in schools nowadays and in the nearest future. They want to be recognized as successful parents and strive for competent parenting. They have acquired digital literacy and are familiar with digital technologies which have become everyday reality of their lives and parenting.

On the other hand – Generation Xers (1965-1985). They have spent a significant part of their lives without digital technologies and do not feel a strong need for them but they are ready to introduce ICT in their lives as they see the enthusiasm of their children and grandchildren for digital technologies and understand their importance for contemporary society. Generation X representatives do not hesitate to acknowledge that they lack digital (information) literacy and consider it more important for younger people. Generation Xers see their parenting aim in the upbringing of a child who will have professional and social ambitions and will become successful in the society based on digital technologies. The fact that they openly admit their digital illiteracy should be considered firstly to be the expression of the conscious willingness to become better at carrying out their socialization and education mission, to be competent parents in the educational environment of the information age. Secondly, it should be seen as a social demand addressed to the professionals in the sphere of family, childhood and education with the aim to solve digital illiteracy problems that cause the digital divide between different generations of parents, legal representatives and grandparents, and the growing social differentiation within regional education community.

Both, parents and professionals, should contribute to the improvement of digital educational environment as the responsibility for children's development and socialization including their school performance lies not only with the learners themselves but also with their families, teachers, education authorities and, ultimately, with the local community in general.

The second problem we revealed while conducting the study is the lack of or low parents' interest in the websites of educational establishments that explains their insufficient activity as the target users. On the one hand, the reason for a low activity level of senior generation users might be the lack of informational value of the digital toolkit – the website of a particular education center. According to its information and education mission, the website of educational establishment provides the parents with the information about child safety in school (this issue causes parent's worry and concern and is ranked first among the questionnaire top five), the existing school physical infrastructure, the conditions of teaching children at each educational stage etc.

Unfortunately, younger parents who actively use digital technologies consider the information on these topics provided on the websites insufficient because of the lack of timely content updates, recent statistical data and visual support. We share parents' view on the issue discussed above. Our analysis of educational establishments' websites showed that during the school year the news feeds were updated extremely rarely or not updated at all in 20% of schools and kindergartens; in 35% of cases the links for visitors' feedback were inactive. Obviously, we have no ground to speak about the effective interaction between family and school. This situation, no doubt, creates a problem field in the educational environment of Tula region. Forums, guest books, online reception desks – aren't they the most demanded services among parents in contemporary school?

The majority of parents in Tula region confidently work on the computer, use smartphones, Skype, social networks and other means of communication based on digital technologies. Parents' activity level in the Internet is rather high: they create various discussion topics, which are constantly updated and expanded. All this witnesses the need for this kind of information resources. The study showed that the most parental messages in the forums were devoted to children's health and health service in the region, messages in the section "Kindergartens" were in the second place, and schools and schoolchildren—in the third place. It is completely understandable as child's health protection, socialization, learning success largely depend on parents and their parental competences. Reading the messages in the forums, we obtain a better understanding of parenting in the region and the problems which are really important and interesting for parents. Contemporary parents want to know what is happening to their child, to influence his or her development and to be involved in this process "here and now". They are oriented towards participation and interested in knowing how their child grows up and develops. They see themselves as influencers and through the interaction in the web they strive to fulfil their parental competences and to become important actors in education and upbringing of their children on an equal footing with school. For this reason, they want to see "alive" and constantly updated content on the school or kindergarten website: open lessons, school subject weeks, kindergarten celebrations, and extracurricular activities that can "inform" parents about all big and small successes of their children. This, in its turn, might motivate parents towards real mutual actions with school, and will unite them in a real parental team, in the digital education community in every corner of the region.

It is a matter of great concern to us that the approved regional “Framework for the Implementation of Target Model of Digital Educational Environment in General Education Organizations and Vocational Education Organizations” (Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva Tul'skoj oblasti ot 16 noyabrya 2018 goda N 724-r, 2018), setting up the activities directed towards the digital transformation of the education system of Tula region, does not provide for a single project oriented towards parents' involvement in this process, in spite of the fact that their socialization and education mission generally recognized in the worldwide practice in the sphere of parenting, education and upbringing of children. This is the third problem connected with episodic parenting support that practically excludes parents as efficient actors and participants from the local digital educational community. For this reason, the use of digital tools, their development and integration into the process of parental competences development are limited in the current education and management practice.

The integrated digital educational environment of parenting support as a factor in improving quality of parents' education has not yet been created in the region. That doesn't surprise us as many regions in different socio- and lingua-cultures are in the same position needing the effective digital educational environment of parenting support, and its lack is one of the most important problems of regional education both in our country and abroad.

International context. Nevertheless, a number of foreign countries have already gained considerable experience in parenting support. There exist leading practices of parental competences development, also in digital educational environment; many education communities implemented them at regional level, and some practices received recognition at national and international level as well. We focused on the best practices of parenting support in digital educational environment of the regions in France.

The country has established an advanced system of Networks for Parenting Support (Réseaux de parentalité in French) (Partnerships between families and early childhood professionals: What links to build?, 2017) in which an information platform is a new way of the development of open communicative environment seen as the environment for cooperative work of parents and other actors in the sphere of family, parenting and childhood. Networks actively carry on their educational mission on the information platforms transforming upbringing practices, parenting and family support provided by professionals, changing the forms of social relations. Interactivity is the key, which “opens” family for parenting support, and changes family social connections in digital educational environment. It reflects cooperative actions of parents and educators for mastering skills in information and communication technologies, for using their possibilities with the aim of educational and professional development. Interactivity is supposed to include the promotion and support of initiative, creative work, self-expression of educational environment participants contributing to the development of informational and educational resources, mutual communicative and counselling support of schools and parents in the most popular format of digital workshops and forums.

French researchers note that the variety of digital toolkits helps create new environments and involve new participants, supports democratic approach in the interaction of families, educational establishments and professionals (Technologies numériques. Les liens familles-professionnels-institutions, 2014).

The leading practices of parenting support in French regions are recognized at national level, their experience was used for the development of National Strategy for Parenting Support 2018-2022. One of its objectives is to make parenting support more visible, clearly defined and reliable, facilitating practical and conceptual unity of the services provided for parents. For this purpose, each region developed the system of geolocation of social services, family centers, educational establishments, as well as the information resources devoted to their parenting support activities available on the renewed web-platform [monenfant.fr](http://monenfant.fr). The strategy also provides for creating the certification system of the Internet resources for parents to guarantee their quality and reliability. This digital toolkit enables each region in France to “connect” families, schools, all subjects of upbringing and education, and to become a trustworthy channel for their ongoing communication and interaction.

## 7. Conclusion

1. In the information age of the 21st century, parenting support is seen both as a challenging and important problem in different socio- and lingua-cultures. Its solution can and should facilitate the unification of researchers for the development of scientific knowledge in this sphere, of practitioners – for the extension of families’ participation in digital educational environment, as well as of parents – for cooperative upbringing and scholarization of children.

2. The idea of the actualization of parenting for the child’s sake, “here and now”, reflects parents’ orientation towards competent parenting, in which contemporary parents want to, are able to and demonstrate their parental competences and/or acquire new ones in the sphere of children’s upbringing and education. The priority guidelines of family and education policy are oriented towards the support of this kind of parenting, as well as towards the development of regional educational systems through the projects and initiatives promoting the implementation of digital toolkits in the regions and the involvement of parents in educational environment of the local community. To improve the quality of national education, the context of family and education policy has to be extended through the development of integrated digital educational environment for parenting support, which is based on the principles of non-stigmatization and normativity of parenting.

3. Three main directions characterize the regional landscape of digital parenting support developed in the education system of a particular territory – in Tula region. In the local education community, the existing digital toolkit (services and resources) of parenting support just partly performs its main function, namely an interactive one. In this regard, it requires enhancement to better fulfill the needs and interests of the target group – parents. We suppose that the prospects of positive developments in this sphere are closely connected with the creation of the information and communication platform within the integrated digital educational environment of the region. The main function of this platform is to facilitate the conditions for the involvement of all participants, including parents, with the aim of the actualization and/or acquisition of parental competences, which are of significance for children, as well as for parents themselves.

4. Every generation of parents is able to use digital tools that provide ample opportunities for the development of parental competences. But to solve the problem of digital inequality educational establishments should do everything possible to make digital resources and services more open for the



consolidation of adults in the region. For this reason, the education authorities of Tula region must clearly specify the tasks for administrative, teaching and technical staff members with the aim of the improvement of the digital toolkit quality and accessibility to meet the needs of regional parent community. We suppose that the variety of digital toolkits significantly expands the possibilities of every family and every educational establishment for participation in regional educational environment.

5. The analysis of the leading practices of parental competences development showed that interactivity is the key to the digital community in the sphere of children's upbringing and education. It enables parents not only to receive and process information but also to share it, to produce their own one, as well as to unify and motivate all actors in the sphere of family, parenting and childhood towards interaction with the ultimate aim – the improvement of quality of life of child and family. The experience of the development and implementation of digital services and resources oriented towards parental competences improvement, that exists in leading foreign practices of parenting support, can be of relevance in the Russian education environment. Through the interaction on the web to real mutual actions – that is the message and the premise of contemporary digital educational environment that facilitates parenting support. We think that this message, erasing socio- and linguacultural boundaries, can unite parents and other actors in the sphere of family, parenting and education.

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