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**Pedagogical Education: History, Present Time, Perspectives**  
**DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR PERSONS IN PENAL**  
**INSTITUTIONS**

A. A. Sivova (a)\*, A. L. Gavrikov (b), N. V. Alexandrova (c)  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Research Institute of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Moscow, Russia, sivoanna@mail.ru  
(b) Yaroslavl-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russia, sovetnik.gal@novsu.ru  
(c) Yaroslavl-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russia, natalia\_nov75@mail.ru

*Abstract*

Today, education in penal institutions offers a relatively simple and inexpensive solution to some of the burdensome social problems of the state. The authors, using the example of world prison practice, prove that there is a clear connection between the provision of educational programs in correctional institutions, on the one hand, and a decrease in the rate of recidivism and an improvement in employment prospects, on the other. The article discusses the problem of distance education of convicts in a penal institution. The process of organizing distance learning of persons sentenced to imprisonment through information and communication technologies is a major research issue. The purpose of the article is to single out information and communication technologies that can be used in the training of convicts based on world prison practice in the field of organizing distance education. The results of the studies led to the idea of amending the functional responsibilities of the penal institution heads in regards to providing convicts 'access to ICT and digital technologies, as well as empowering educational organizations and correctional institutions to draw up individual curricula in accordance with the needs of convicts. There is an opportunity to introduce the latest developments in the field of distance education, offering large-scale interactive participation and open access through Worldwide Web or other network technologies, in domestic correctional institutions, taking into account the requirements of current documents regulating the activities of the penal system of the Russian Federation.

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**Keywords:** Convicts, distance e-learning, education, penal institution.



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## **1. Introduction**

Evidence suggests that education is critical to reducing the rate of reoffending and therefore lowering crime rates (Sysuev, 2015). Currently, for example, in the UK, 46% of prisoners commit a second crime within 12 months of their release. This high level of recidivism is detrimental to the victims and costs the country's taxpayers £ 13 billion a year to invest in prisons to upgrade them (GOV.UK, 2019). Consequently, the education of convicts was recognized as cost-effective given the direct costs of providing it and costs associated with repeated imprisonment. However, only one out of four prisoners in the country is employed after being released from prison compared with the current level of employment in the country, which is 74.1%. In addition, only 1 out of 6 (16%) leaves the correctional institution with an education (GOV.UK, 2019).

There are several obstacles to the participation of convicts in educational programs during the period of serving their sentences in prisons in various countries. Penal institution teachers may face differences in the age of students, their level of education, or their employment history. Also, in prisons, safety issues are more important than educational goals, which limit the ability to receive certain specialties. Problems may arise when prisoners need to be transferred to another correctional facility from an operational point of view. Distance education is more often carried out online, which is a serious obstacle, since most countries prohibit prisoners from accessing the Internet by prison internal regulations and other departmental regulations.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Of particular research interest is the process of organizing distance learning of persons sentenced to imprisonment through information and communication technologies (hereinafter - ICT) in different countries. At the present stage of the development of approaches to improving the quality of education in places of imprisonment of different states, when choosing educational methods, special attention is paid to the introduction of new technologies, for example, e-learning, into the practice of penal institution teachers. In our opinion, among other advantages, this is the most acceptable way of providing convicted students with the possibility of a more suitable training path for the punishment system and / or access to personalized education support. The use of ICT can be a cost-effective solution for involving convicts in the educational process, as well as meeting the various needs of all convicts in the field, which is often not possible with traditional forms of training.

## **3. Research Questions**

Subject to consideration are issues directly related to the study of the use of ICT in the process of education of convicts in a penal institution. The objects of study are the educational needs of different types of convicts, the ability of convicts to access higher-level training, the potential of IT to support education. Based on the information received, within the framework of this study, proposals can be developed on the introduction of international experience in organizing distance e-learning for convicts in domestic correctional institutions.

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

To study and analyze the international experience in organizing distance learning for convicts; to identify the national features of distance e-learning in a penal institution; establish the factors affecting the influence of education received by convicts on committing repeated offenses and successful reintegration into society after release through employment.

#### **5. Research Methods**

For the most effective research in the field of organizing distance e-learning at penal institutions of different countries, empirical methods were used - a description with information recording, observation, comparison, as well as a general scientific method - an analysis method - in order to study in detail international experience in the field of education of convicts in places of their imprisonment.

#### **6. Findings**

The use of the above-mentioned research methods made it possible to identify the features of the organization of distance learning for convicts serving sentences in places of detention. So, in order to prevent the growth of recidivism, it is important for correctional institutions to create an effective educational environment that assumes sufficient level of education and training, including a personality-oriented approach to students (Soare, 2016), integrity and flexibility, as well as meeting the real needs of convicts before and after release (O'Brien, 2010). For the successful implementation of the research task in the framework of this article, the most effective way of educating prisoners is considered - distance e-learning. Digital systems are critical to provision of high-quality education (Yang, 2018). If prisoners find work after release, continue their studies or otherwise contribute to society, they should be given the opportunity to use and improve their digital skills in prison.

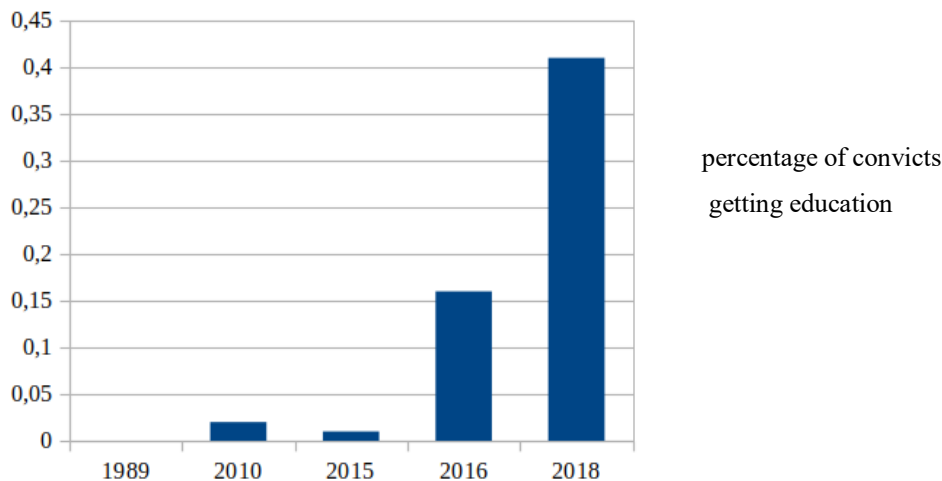
Distance learning programs can be full-distance learning or a combination of distance learning and traditional classroom learning (called hybrid or blended) (Dzhanelli, 2018). Massive open online courses offering wide-ranging interactive participation and open access through the World Wide Web or other network technologies are recent developments in the field of distance education (Sujova, 2016). Terms such as distributed learning, e-learning, online learning, virtual classes, etc. are used as a synonym for distance education (Dragon, 2019).

It is important to use ICT in prisons, which will undoubtedly provide prisoners with access to relevant information and up-to-date scientific materials. The introduction of these technologies will make it possible to overcome the problem of lack of continuity (Ezechil, 2016) for those convicts who are transferred for some reason to another correctional facility, or who are serving short-term sentences, or are released ahead of schedule.

Persons serving sentences in penal institutions, as a rule, have limited access to ICT and the Internet, which is explained by the requirements of the security regime, the prevention of crime risk and the understanding that access to technology is a "luxury" that is not provided according to a prison regime. However, in most countries, prisoners have access to distance education, and they are required to pay all or part of the costs involved.

Currently, there are some examples of national and transnational projects and initiatives aimed at identifying new practical ways of using ICT in education in a penal institution.

We would dwell in more detail on the experience of educating convicts in the UK, as it is there, as is clear from the chart “The number of convicts who received education in UK prisons”, there is an increase in the number of convicts involved in the educational process in prisons (Figure 01).



**Figure 01.** The number of convicts who received secondary education in prisons in the UK

A comprehensive plan is being implemented throughout England and Wales to transform the standards of education in prisons and to help convicts acquire the skills and knowledge they need to give up crime. The country initiated the introduction of the distance learning system “Virtual Campus” (GOV.UK, 2019). A virtual campus is a secure web space, a tool that offers convicts who study the opportunity to access learning materials and educational programs through secure access to websites to help them on their way to social reintegration. This educational model is considered as a modern way of teaching, training and employment, which can motivate and involve students in the learning process (as opposed to more traditional methods). It also helps to link education in places of detention with a general system of education, training and employment, which, of course, makes it possible to continue the education started in the correctional institution after release (Sivova, 2019).

This form of educating convicts with the help of the Internet and multimedia is accessible to most students, with the exception of some risk groups. In this case, a tentative and personal approach is applied to each convict taking into account the risk assessment and unique qualities, which determines the number of sites and their contents that the convicts could use and watch (GOV.UK, 2019). Online education provides convicts with a smooth transition “through the gates” of the penitentiary system: when convicts are transferred to another correctional institution or released, they take their profile and the final work, which are stored in their electronic portfolio. Thus, they can continue their education based on previous documents (final works, resumes and appointments, etc.) and there is no need to start all over again. In addition, students have the opportunity to communicate and receive timely support from consultants and educators remotely through ICT.

The “Virtual Campus” pilot project has benefits for the UK penitentiary system, its staff, and the convicts involved. It brings economic benefits by optimizing the working time of teachers, while convicts consider that using a computer and the Internet they feel part of civil society. For them the virtual campus creates equal conditions with ordinary citizens, providing the convicts with the opportunity to undergo training remotely, as well as post their resume or monitor the situation on the labor market and current vacancies while in a correctional institution.

However, when introducing distance e-learning into the penitentiary education system, it is important to make sure that the use of modern information and communication technologies not just open the way for convicts to self-education which can lead to their isolation, but makes it possible to get an education with the support of qualified specialists (Pogodina, 2017). An analysis of educational practices in UK prisons showed that a virtual campus should not be seen as a means to reduce the number of teachers working in prisons. A tutor or mentor is still required as a professional support, because the relationship between the teacher and the student is often necessary for effective training, in particular in the case of prisoners who have negative educational experience in the past.

It should also be borne in mind that some convicts have limited ICT skills. Therefore, when they cannot gain access to the teacher’s immediate support, some of them lose interest in learning and exit educational programs. That is why special attention should be paid to methods of overcoming the difficulties caused by the lack of full-time contact between teachers and people studying in prisons; only when fully implemented, e-learning can provide a viable alternative to the traditional education system.

## 7. Conclusion

The research showed that due to an increase in employment rates of convicts after release and a decrease in the number of recidivism related to prison education, financial savings for the state as a whole and taxpayers in particular more than compensate for the cost of the programs. An analysis of the use of the latest developments in the field of distance education of convicts, offering wide-scale interactive participation and open access through WorldWideWeb or other network technologies, made it possible to formulate a number of proposals necessary to increase the level of efficiency of the training process for persons in prison:

- firstly, providing educational institutions and the penitentiary system with the power to draw up a curriculum in accordance with the needs of convicts helps to provide them with educational opportunities and qualifications that will actually help them get meaningful and decent job after release;
- secondly, the preparation of individual personal education plans for each convict upon arrival at the prison ensures the priority of the education of each imprisoned person;
- thirdly, providing penal institutions heads with greater freedom of action regarding prisoners’ access to ICT and digital technologies to facilitate their education contributes to the wider use of innovative technologies, which significantly improves the quality, quantity and range of education provided to convicts, while maintaining important guarantees.

Also, the experience of using distance e-learning in penal institutions of different countries proves the possibility of using modern information and communication technologies in the education of convicts in institutions of the penal system of the Russian Federation. This form of education significantly expands the possibilities of convicts to obtain a sought-after and promising education, which, of course, affects their successful re-socialization and integration into civil society.

However, one should not forget to comply with the requirements of the Internal Rules of Correctional Institutions, approved by order of the Ministry of Justice of Russia dated 16.12.2016 No. 295, security regime and measures that ensure the execution of imprisonment in accordance with the criminal executive law of the Russian Federation, creating conditions for ensuring law and order, safety of convicts. Safety should be a key factor in any initiatives on implementing educational projects in prisons.

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