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THE COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR OF GENERATION Z IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the main socio-psychological characteristics of generation Z, which determine the features of their communicative behavior in the educational environment, including the higher education system. Obviously, education acts as an instrument for the translation of knowledge and values, formation of identity; when starting the educational process, an individual not only learns a certain set of knowledge and skills, but also masters the rules of the cognitive process, determined by the values of the particular society. At the same time, nowadays people, who were born after 2000 and have obviously different requests for the organization and content of the educational process, enter schools and universities. The research showed that the main features of the communication practices, common for generation Z, are mobility, accessibility, efficiency, performance, excitement and easiness. The article presents the analysis of methods for overcoming the contradictions between the "classical" educational technologies that have proved their effectiveness at the previous stage, used by the present generation of teachers, and the features of cognitive and research activities of generation Z. There comes the conclusion, that the focus on technological innovations (equipment modernization) only and transition to "online" are unable to solve this problem properly. It is necessary to use educational methods and technologies that combine the achievements of older generations and the needs of future ones.

Keywords: Communication, education, educational environment, generation Z, on-line education, society

1. Introduction

Currently, an important problem is the study of the communicative behavior of generation Z in the sphere of higher education, since its representatives have been attending universities for at least two years. Those grown-ups from the first generation of the 21st century show significant socio-psychological differences in comparison with previous generations and it largely determines the features of their behavior in the educational environment. The result is the rapid growth of the online education market, which, according to experts, should be $282.62 billion by 2023; the share of the Russian segment should reach 60 billion rubles (Asmolov & Guseltseva, 2019). This problem became particularly relevant with the transition to distance learning in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Problem Statement

Generation Z revolutionizes the education system in many ways. Its representatives learn differently due to the specifics of working with technologies: they had an access to broadband Internet for almost whole their lives, grew up surrounded by means of operational communication. Providing an opportunity to work with large amounts of information and quick feedback, it leads to a lack of information retention skill, the loss of authority by the "wise encyclopedists" (now often being irritated) and impatience when achieving results.

The pedagogical stuff of higher education was not ready to work with a new generation of students. This is especially true for Russia. Even the generation Y, which representatives have actually finished university, passed unnoticed for Russian high education system.

Moreover, different participants of the educational process (the state, students, parents) have their own goals: the state aims at the socialization of individuals, the formation of professional groups and loyal electorate; students consider education as a social lift, and parents – as a guarantee of successful future for their children. In this situation, the effectiveness of educational process becomes difficult to verify and the question "how should one study?" supplements the question "why should one study?"

Generation Z representatives are not affected by traditional threats by parents or teachers. The role of parents in the modern educational system, including higher education, should not be underestimated. Being spoiled by parents in childhood, having support in conflict situations with representatives of the pedagogical stuff at school, modern students are not ready to perceive a teacher as a "presenter of everything" and a source of the only true knowledge. In other words, for generation Z, the authority of a teacher is formed due to not only professional (knowledge) qualities, but also skills in the sphere of effective communications. It is important to note that often teachers and new students do not understand each other because of very significant cross-cultural differences.

3. Research Questions

In this article, there is no need to consider the historiography of the topic in detail, since there are already quite comprehensive reviews on this problem in foreign and Russian literature (Maletin, 2017). According to many opinions, generation Z consists of people born from 1999-2000 to 2015. In Russia,

generation Z is people born after 2000 (Puchkova et al., 2017). The authors of this article share this opinion. Many features of the first digital generation of the third millennium were formed during the process of primary socialization. Generation Z was growing up in completely different informational, technological, socio-economic and political conditions.

First of all, the socialization of generation Z took place in the conditions of the information-technology revolution. This generation became the first one of true "digital natives". Its representatives were born in the world of cell phones and smartphones, the search for information on Google, social networks. They are characterized by the widespread usage of the Internet from a very young age (Knyazev & Belykh, 2017).

In this article, there are the analysis of such important problems as specifics of generation Z socialization process, the main socio-psychological characteristics of this generation, the features of communicative behavior in the educational environment, including higher education. The study also shows the possibilities of transformation and optimization of the educational process if using the specifics of the personal psychological characteristics of generation Z students in order to increase its effectiveness.

4.   Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to develop ideas for improving the organization of the educational process at university, taking into account the peculiarities of generation Z communicative behaviour. The possibilities of bridging the gap between classical educational methods and cognitive abilities of Z students are explored.

5.   Research Methods

The methodological basis of this research is a combination of systemic and cultural approaches that allow to identify and justify the transformation patterns in the system of Russian higher education, as well as the conditions for the interaction of various factors that directly influenced the formation, establishment and functioning of fundamental social values. These values are associated with the process of education in current conditions: changes in the educational paradigm and the communicative behavior of the educational process participants, EdTech market growth. Thus, the higher education appears as a system that functions according to certain laws, based on a set of rules, priorities and values, the identification of which will help to assess the possibilities of transforming the entire system at the present stage.

The theory of generations is defined as a methodological concept, which makes it possible to identify the specifics of socialization of different demographic groups. This allows us to determine the features of the communicative behavior that is common for these generations in the modern educational environment.

Based on the main ideas of the generation theory, there is a statement, that those born in certain specific historical conditions (16-20 years period) have common life values and socio-psychological features. Each generation is influenced by global events, political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of the country's development (Tikhomandritskaya et al., 2019).

However, it is necessary to note that this research is based on studies of generation Z representatives primarily from the United States and European countries. Of course, global factors affect all regions, but

each country has its own political, economic and social characteristics, which somehow describe all the periods. This is especially true for the history of modern Russia from 2000 to the present. In this regard, there are many methodological issues that require independent research.

6. Findings

According to the modern studies, generation Z representatives have formed a number of needs in the process of socialization that determine its consumer and communicative behaviour. The need for information, emotional satisfaction, new impressions, novelty, which realize in travel, education and game are the most important ones (Higa, 2016).

The need for cognition takes one of the first places in the hierarchy of needs of this generation. Young people seek education. Every second representative of generation Z is going to graduate from university, and considers higher education as the goal in life (Leontieva & Kotenko, 2017). Moreover, there is a high demand for various options of complementary education, which is characterized by mobility, short-term and focus on the development of a specific skill (painting a sunset in oils, creating a beaded brooch in the form of a butterfly, etc.). At the same time, the centennials see the idea of education from the other side, than their teachers do – learning should be "for fun", give pleasure, drive, "buzz" (Volkova et al., 2018).

One of the most important needs is one for communication and acceptance by peers. Representatives of this generation are characterized by the desire to always be in touch and the fear of loneliness, which means for them to be a loser. They tend to rely on peer influence, even those with whom they have never met in person. This leads to the growth of the social networks influence and difficulties in off-line communication.

Thus, generation Z has a unique set of socio-psychological characteristics. As a rule, all researchers note strong multitasking skills based on social media as the most important feature of this generation. However, lack of multitasking skill in education is noticed more and more often recently. Many studies suggests that multitasking disturbs education and cognitive development (Golovko et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this issue requires further research.

As we have already noted, generation Z is significantly different from previous generations in terms of perception of information. These students perceive, classify and process large amounts of information more quickly by using the Internet as the main source of not only theoretical knowledge, but also social skills, which they then apply in real life situations. Visualization of this information is very important feature. Some particular qualities of such perception have influenced the functioning of other mental processes, such as memory. There is an opinion that the representatives of generation Z remember not the content of information, but the way of how it is found, the path. That leads to the dominance of appeal to short-term memory in the cognitive process (Popova, 2016).

All the described features of generation Z communicative behavior determine the attitude to the main forms of the educational process organization and to traditional lectures. A number of Russian and foreign publications indicate that there are some difficulties, which representatives of generation Z have with perception of lectures (Hampton & Keys, 2017). The personal experience and observations of the authors state the same. This problem is due to several factors. Firstly, as a strategy for getting new

information a lecture is not common for centennials. The linearity of narration, one's own inactivity in perception, the lack of a quick practical result, large amounts of information make this form difficult to integrate into one's own picture of the world.

Moreover, generation Z is characterized by clip consciousness, which determines cognitive opportunities and strategies: information is mainly perceived in the form of short stories, content is processed in small portions. Students with this type of consciousness can quickly perceive and analyze information, create intersubject connections based on the principle of hyperlinks. They prefer short texts that fit on the screen, and as a result give much attention to structuring and visualizing information with the help of tables, diagrams, infographics (Soldatova & Rasskazova, 2019). Therefore, despite the fact that students of generation Z are much better oriented in large information flows, they are not able to work with massive texts. A distinctive feature of generation Z with their specifics of perceiving information is the so-called 8-second filter – the ability to estimate quickly how interesting the information is for them. It creates even more difficulties for teachers. Nowadays the attention of students is possible to hold only for 10-15 minutes, though when changing the topic or slide theme in the presentation, a teacher has only 8-10 seconds to interest the student. If a teacher fails, then students switch to other sources of information, such as smartphone. Of course, this complicates the presentation of lecture material.

This seems to be associated with such characteristics of generation Z as hyperactivity, which means restlessness, disinhibition and attention-deficit. As a result, they quickly lose interest in monotonous educational activities that require long concentration. The combination of clip consciousness and the phenomenon of 8-second filter with hyperactivity creates serious problems for modern teachers. The new generation of students do not perceive the traditional forms of lecture and practical (seminar) classes; this leads to their withdrawing into a "different reality", conversations in the classroom, conflicts with teachers and to problems with academic performance. At the same time, it is noted that generation Z can be distinguished by perseverance and determination in cases where the topic or task really interests them. They can spend hours searching for content on the Internet, processing a large amount of information and shaping it appropriately (Soldatova et al., 2018).

Some researchers note that from psychological point of view generation Z has a tendency toward social autization – withdrawing into oneself as a way of interacting with the outside world. This is largely due to the digital way of communication. The digital natives are better at technology rather than interpersonal communication. Therefore, they are inclined to roll up into a shell. The lack of interpersonal communication and interaction skills leads to the fact that modern young people may be not very sociable in groups. Generation Z students require complementary training in interpersonal and communication skills in the real world (Martsinkovskaya et al., 2018).

An important feature of generation Z communicative behavior is the requirement for immediate feedback, which is fundamental to them. Always keeping in touch with important people is obligatory. Z-users spend most of their time on social networks, and the biggest part of communication with friends takes place in messengers, with the help of pictures, emoticons and emoji. The most popular communication channels for generation Z are VKontakte, WhatsApp, Instagram etc. (Martsinkovskaya et al., 2018). However, the usage of predominantly digital communication reduces writing skills and this affects correct spelling, grammar and shorthand writing.

The considered personal and socio-psychological characteristics of generation Z largely determine the specifics of the communicative behavior of its representatives in the educational environment. Modern students do not like the authoritarian educational method. They recognize the authority of a teacher only by his personal and professional qualities. Students of generation Z are not impressed by the method of "wise man on stage" or online "talking head". It is more convenient for them when teachers act as facilitators or guides. The students have good abilities for self-education and critical thinking, though only when they feel that they learn something important or valuable. They prefer active learning and a student-centered educational environment. Centennials are used to cross-subjects learning. Students see each paragraph of the textbook riddled with hyperlinks, as in Wikipedia. They like to explore using their own itineraries (Puchkova et al., 2017).

Students of generation Z prefer individual and independent education rather than teamwork, they hope professors to help them participate and apply content. Students may look for a prompt answer instead of solving problems, they like short cuts. Nowadays, researchers and practicing teachers suggest new educational strategies for generation Z representatives, taking into account their personal and social psychological qualities (Rozanov et al., 2018).

Perhaps the most important proposal is to understand generation Z students and accept the differences between them and teachers, who belong to other generations. This is especially difficult for older teachers due to serious intercultural differences, so this requires special research. In the process of communication, it is important to stop "teaching" Z-students, but to talk on equal terms. Teachers should appreciate the new generation, their digital skills and the way they can be used. Generation Z students need to know why they have to complete assignments, what practical value they have, and how they meet their educational requirements. To be effective teachers for these students, we need to learn how to step back from the stage and facilitate a truly effective student-centered educational environment.

The concept of "Student-Centered Learning", which is characterized with intention to engage students in goal-setting and teamwork and to use active learning forms, problem and game approaches, is proposed as the main principle of the educational process. The fair estimation of the group is worth much attention. Students learn better if the results are obvious and integrated in an appropriate context. It is important to encourage critical thinking, create opportunities for reflection and promote different points of view. In terms of content, it is necessary to determine the main context, the coherence of topics, the illustration of theoretical ideas with practical examples, which should be vivid and realistic in content, but brief in form.

Students should be given more freedom when choosing topics for independent work, specific tasks. This new generation of students wants to be creative and think critically about problems, but only if they can see the relevance of the subject in everyday life. Therefore, they are quite inclined to project activities that focus on solving real practical problems. In the next five years, the most effective professors will complete tasks directly with students and show them that it is normal to make mistakes.

Generation Z students, who reach smart devices every seven minutes, want to keep in touch with teachers. Therefore, it makes sense to try to engage these students to communicate on learning questions through familiar channels. Nowadays, students want to communicate by e-mail instead of going to consultations. They appreciate the ability to communicate on Skype when they can get personalized

attention and assistance. They also pay attention to how fast communication is and they are very upset, if have to wait for an answer by e-mail or in online classes.

It is necessary to provide fast access to learning materials. Generation Z students have had access to high-speed Internet throughout most of their lives. It is important for them how fast they can access digital instruments; they are not patient for a long wait. Students expect to find the information they need quickly and are often disappointed if search for solution is not so simple.

Evaluation of knowledge and completed tasks is important. As it was already noted, that generation Z does not accept criticism and due to its socialization features, is used only to a positive mark. Therefore, in any case, they should first be praised with rewards, even with small ones. In order Z-student to complete the task properly, it should be formulated as accurately as possible, algorithmically.

Each task must be evaluated according to a clear and familiar to the students the point-rating system. Such a system should be "transparent" and corresponding with the ideas of new generation students about honesty and objectivity. It is possible to supplement the rating with emotional means. Over the past three years and in two universities one of the authors of this article used promotional stickers for children in order to evaluate the graphic works of freshmen of different specialties and subjects in the format of Mind maps, which made most of students perfectly excited. Many of them were ready to perform the tasks only because they really wanted to receive such a positive sticker.

The analysis of the behavioral characteristics common for generation Z students allows us to conclude that a transition from a strong vertical educational structure to a network one is necessary, because there teacher and student interact at the same level as a "team". The form of information is also changing: there should be a transition from a classical linear narration, "from simple to complex" text filled with nominal hyperlinks, which show the interests of students. In this regard, the structuring and marking of information is of great importance.

At the same time, the demand for offline interaction is obvious in the modern educational environment. Such soft skills as teamwork, responsibility, discipline, adaptability, creativity, etc. which are not related to a specific subject area, are largely formed in the process of direct communication.

7. Conclusion

Speaking about the impact of the behavioral characteristics of Generation Z on the higher education system in the Russian Federation, it is necessary to note that not only technology (the usage of technical means of remote access, appeal to modern forms of communication: messengers, social networks, etc.), but also content should be transformed. In fact, studies show that the points of EdTech growth in 2018-2019 were mobile learning and micro-learning. There is a demand for micro-courses, which content can be learned within a few hours, and the acquired skills can be used immediately. Classical higher education with a bachelor (4 years), a master (2 years), and postgraduate studies (2 years) programs is not able to meet these needs, so this causes dissatisfaction of students and their parents with both the process and the educational results. However, the largest number of supplementary education courses worldwide is associated with the school program. Most likely, this is because the parents make sure their child enters a "respectable university" and its diploma, regardless of the content, can provide a good career start. At the same time, the dissonance between students' expectations and realities of university life create the same

question for the higher education system that was posed to cultural institutions time ago: whether it is necessary to "lower the subject" to the audience, to become comfortable and understandable for them, or to "pull them up" to their standards. As always, the answer is something between.

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