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**PROSPECTS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT
OF PUBLIC LIFE DIGITALIZATION**

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Abstract

The article deals with peculiarities of transformation of higher education system under the conditions of transition to the sixth technological order. Based on the data of international ratings the authors draw attention to the decline in some indicators of the level of “human capital” development in Russia. This is a significant obstacle to the innovative economy formation in the context of the increased competition between countries. The authors analyse the main measures of legislative support for the digitalization of higher education; consider the risks and problems associated with the introduction of digital technologies into the educational process of Russia. The authors describe new opportunities in the spheres of training skilled lawyers, including that of LegalTech, which allows the use of various digital products designed to optimize lawyers’ work. Special attention is paid to the prospects of interaction between educational organizations, vendors and employers, who are primarily interested in training good specialists. Attention is drawn to the fact that the widespread use of digital technologies affects the forms and practices of the educational process in Russian institutions of higher education. However, the widespread introduction of distance learning technologies causes a mixed reaction on the part of both students and teachers. While discussing the level of prevalence of digital technologies and communications in society, attention is drawn to the rare use of digital technologies in the strategies of teaching Russian students, to the insufficient dissemination of additional education practices in comparison with European trends.

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1. Introduction

Digitalization is a process in which actions previously performed by individuals without the use of any digital products are transferred to the digital environment (On Approval of Explanations ..., 2018). Researchers' attention to the specific features of digitalization of higher education is determined by the fact that the rapid development of the Internet and digital technologies is changing both the structure of the economy and the daily social practices of individuals, expanding their opportunities not only in terms of getting jobs, education, and various services, but also in terms of participating in political and social activities ranging from political actions to charity and volunteer activities.

The growth of the market share of intellectual products, the transition to a new sixth technological order determine alteration in some characteristics of the modern education system. In recent years, these factors have been increasingly paid attention to by the governments of various countries that develop and implement appropriate state policies in the field of education, which are designed to ensure an effective development of the "learning society".

2. Problem Statement

Taking into consideration the fact that the competitiveness of the Russian state is largely determined by the level and state of human development, which, in its turn, depends on the quality of education and the characteristics of the labour market, we consider it necessary to pay attention to the main trends in the digitalization of higher education in Russia, including the legal one, and compare them with similar processes in the Italian Republic.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the research involves the trends in the development of higher (university) education, determined by the digitalization of public life.

Special attention is paid to the digitalization of legal education, including employment of LegalTech.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is a comprehensive interdisciplinary consideration of the problems associated with the introduction of digital technologies determining the main difficulties and prospects of new educational trajectories into the university educational process.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods were desk research for the analysis of statistical data, case-study used for identification of the human development level dominant indicators, as well as secondary analysis of the data presented in some sociological studies, both Russian and foreign, and devoted to the problems of digitalization and education.

To analyse the legal framework regulating the digitalization of public life and the sphere of university education, special legal methods were used, such as formal and dogmatic, historical and legal, comparative and legal.

6. Findings

The success and competitiveness of modern states presuppose the effective use of human capital (Zheng et al., 2011), the most important component of which is the intellectual potential, which determines the content and structure of the modern economy, where the source of economic growth is the production of knowledge. We consider it necessary to pay attention to some indicators of the level of intellectual capital in accordance with recognized international ratings.

It is important to emphasize that the Education Index remains the most cited and is included in the Human Development Report (2020) prepared by the United Nations (UN). It is based on the following indicators: life duration expectancy for both sexes; total gross enrolment ratio in primary, secondary and higher education; adult literacy rate; GDP per capita at purchasing power parity in US dollars.

According to the Human Development Report, Italy ranks 29th and is in the middle of the list of countries with a high Human Resource Index (together with Estonia, followed by the United Arab Emirates and Greece). Russia being 49th is at the end of the list (followed by Belarus and Kazakhstan) (Human Development Report, 2020).

In the rating of the Global Innovation Index, which is formed by the World Bank within the framework of the “Knowledge for Development” program based on the assessment of 109 qualitative and structural indicators, Russia is 47th and Italy is 28th. It should be noted that Russia has the lowest indicators for the level of development of institutions. It includes the legal and economic environment, the quality of its regulation, the ability of society and its institutions to use effectively the existing knowledge and development of the new one (71st place). The highest Russia’s indicator refers to the level of human capital (30th place) (Who Will Finance Innovation?, 2020).

It is obvious that low Human Resource indicators may negatively affect the prospects for the country’s participation in the global economic processes. At the same time, the centres for political decision-making see the solution to the problem in the dissemination and implementation of digital technologies in the system of secondary and higher education.

Recently, digitalization has affected almost all spheres of public life, and the new COVID-19 pandemic has once again confirmed the relevance of this process. It is not by chance that a comparative sociological study involving Russia, Italy, the United States, and the United Kingdom revealed significant differences in the level of respondents’ concern about education, especially in its online mode (in Russia, about 21 % of respondents were concerned about the problems of obtaining quality education, and in Italy only 11 % of them).

The digitalization trends are topical in the field of law. For example, Federal Law No. 480-FZ of December 27, 2019 (On Amendments to the Fundamentals ..., 2019) amended the Fundamentals of the Legislation of the Russian Federation on Notaries, expanding the possibilities of using digital technologies when performing notarial services.

April 2021 was particularly rich in events related to digitalization. The media informed the public about the notarization of the first remote transaction (First Remote Transaction Certified in Russia, 2021), and a bill on the digitalization of enforcement proceedings was submitted to the State Duma (On Amendments to Certain Legislative..., 2021). At the same time, the draft federal law was sent to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation for introduction of amendments into three procedural codes (Civil Procedure Code, Arbitration Procedure Code, and Code of Administrative Procedure). These amendments concern the possibility of remote participation of parties in court sessions using web conferences, submission of documents in an electronic form through the federal state information system “Unified Portal of State and Municipal Services (Functions)”, familiarization with case materials in an electronic form, and so forth (On Amendments to Certain Legislative..., 2021).

The noticeably growing interest of the legal community in the introduction of technologies that allow automating various areas of legal activity makes it necessary not only to study this phenomenon comprehensively, but also to expand training opportunities for future specialists, including the field of LegalTech (the abbreviation was coined on the basis of the English word combination – legal technology), concerning the development and use of various software products, platforms, tools designed specifically to optimize the lawyers’ work.

The existing educational standards in the field of law do not provide for the acquisition of skills in the field of LegalTech as mandatory, while under the conditions of active digitalization of society, the competencies in question are in demand. However, classical universities are not able to implement efficiently such training without the participation of vendors and without gaining access to the use of the existing technologies. Prospects can be traced in the further close cooperation of educational organizations, vendors and employers, who are interested in training qualified specialists.

The national program “Digital Economy of the Russian Federation” introduces measures for digitalization of various spheres of life, including the education sector. The program provides for updating the material and technical basis in educational organizations, including computer equipment, software, development of the digital environment for interaction (including the “peer-to-peer” format), platforms for conducting online classes, and so forth. At the same time, within the framework of the national project “Digital Economy of the Russian Federation”, which implies the widespread introduction of digital technologies into various spheres of the Russian society, the project “Personnel for the Digital Economy” (2021) was provided. This project is the most important basis for the transformation of educational policy in the Russian Federation.

The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of November 16, 2020 No. 1836 (On the State Information System..., 2020) testifies to the vector of development of education towards digitalization. In addition, the portal Modern Digital Educational Environment in the Russian Federation has been developed, though it is still a pilot project (Modern Digital Educational Environment..., 2021).

Open educational resources represented by various types of training materials in the public domain are becoming quite popular. A sociological survey with the example of Chinese consumers showed that such open educational resources combining traditional and online learning methods are very effective, allowing to deepen professional knowledge, or the sphere of personal interests of students (Sabirova, 2018).

As for Italy, the changes in the higher education system are related mostly to the programs of the European Union. The European Commission (The Importance of the Digital Transformation, 2011; Digital Education Policies in Europe and Beyond..., 2017) declared that the transition to the digital economy is the main driver of economic growth determining the states' policies in the field of education. In particular, based on The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators, which demands that teachers acquire digital competencies (Salmieri, 2019), various methods are being developed to improve teachers' and students' skills of working in a digital environment. Such methods as Didattica e Insegnamento in Università, The Teaching Practices Inventory and The Teaching Perspectives Inventory allow educators to describe teaching practices, classify expertise, determine the needs of teachers and work out new protocols in the educational environment (Clerici et al., 2021).

Studies conducted by Russian sociologists and legal experts indicate that the surveyed students stress the accessibility, convenience, speed and relevance of the information received as positive aspects of education digitalization. At the same time, lack of personal contact with the teacher and other students in the process of mastering educational programs and the need for strict self-discipline are assessed as negative factors. Some respondents express concerns about the impossibility of obtaining fundamental knowledge in an online format and demonstrate ambiguous assessments of the digitalization of public life (Levashov et al., 2021). Some authors, on the contrary, note a high assessment of the quality of teaching with the help of distance educational technologies in comparison with traditional methods (Sadykova, 2020).

According to a number of researchers, the leading countries in the application of distance education are the United States, China, India, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, Finland (Chernikova & Belenov, 2019). A very serious attitude to the implementation of distance education opportunities in North Korea, was demonstrated, for example, by the news published on the portal Gazetta.ru on April 10, 2021 about Kim Jong-un's decision to execute the Minister of Education for the ineffective implementation of the law on distance learning (Kim Jong-un Has Executed a Minister..., 2021).

In general, the implementation of educational programs in a remote format is a logical trajectory that corresponds to the scientific and technical revolution, the active development of telecommunication technologies and the capabilities of the Internet.

At the time of the pandemic lockdown and the mass transition to the implementation of educational programs using distance and e-learning technologies, a number of educational institutions activated their own digital platforms, which previously had been used optionally. At the same time, the capabilities of such platforms did not always allow to replace completely the traditional educational process in a short time. This caused the need to turn to third-party services, conclude contracts and agreements, conduct training for faculty, and provide a high-speed and stable Internet connection. Besides, not every student, or teacher had the necessary technical equipment and capabilities. Sometimes they also lacked the appropriate skills to participate in the educational process in a new format. In the conditions under consideration, it was revealed that students are not always sufficiently trained in communication skills in the digital environment at the level of secondary education, as well as the unwillingness of some teachers to master new ways of teaching.

Among the main risks, some of which were confirmed during the pandemic, the Modern Digital Educational Environment in the Russian Federation Project Passport indicated a low level of trust and willingness to use modern educational technologies, a decrease in the effectiveness of teaching methods, the lack of additional financial opportunities for the implementation of a new training format, and so forth (Modern Digital Educational Environment..., 2016).

According to the review of citizens' appeals received by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2020, at the beginning of the transition period to distance learning touched mainly on procedural issues (the methodology of distance education; the use of distance education technologies and e-learning). After students' adaptation to the changed conditions appeals related to the quality of education (Review of Citizens' Appeals Received..., 2020).

7. Conclusion

Analysing the Russian and foreign trends in digitalization of education described in the literature, its advantages and disadvantages, we can conclude that this process is in demand now. The high level of human capital development is often offset by the peculiarities of the structure of the economy and the labour market, which can be seen both in Europe (e.g., in Italy) and in Russia.

The considered circumstances made it possible to identify individual development trajectories of higher educational institutions in the implementation of educational programs using distance-learning technologies and the advantages of developing a digital educational environment. The need to develop digital competencies, such as, for example, information literacy, maintaining security, creating digital content, and so forth, becomes obvious. Information technology can significantly expand the variety of social and political practices, educational opportunities, or participation of people in any other public relations, regardless of age, mobility, or time zone.

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