OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPGRADING EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL'S QUALIFICATION THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES IN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: This paper seeks to explore the modern education as an institution which goal is to nurture and develop personality, since an important recent trend in the information society has been a new look at the factors of social production, the growing role of human capital and intellectual resources. The research has revealed some major catalyzers of interest to the distance learning: a strive for obtaining significant amounts of information that is evidence based; advancements in education technologies; ample business prospects; personalization of education; a distinct opportunity for building individual learning trajectories, etc. This paper provides a theoretical underpinning for the major structural elements of a modern distance learning model: developing a strong ability to self-directed learning; cooperation; dialogue; proactivity; independence.

Keywords: knowledge, distance learning, personality, modernization, worldview, education, technology, online courses, spiritual and moral development.

1 Introduction

Today in Russia, the distance learning technologies are gaining a particularly strong impetus. Distance learning is the kind of innovation in the system of education. A term distance education has not firmly established in the pedagogical literature, it refers to the distant learning and distant education.

The grim reality of present days with its inherent instability, exacerbating crises and pandemic that has reduced direct contacts between people poses new challenges for universities. Among such challenges is the readiness for an effective interaction with different categories of process participants, including both students and school teachers, in the educational space by means of online technologies. Within a general trend of digitization in education, distance technologies render higher flexibility and greater convenience to the learning process. The society's need for distance learning courses has economic roots due to their lower price and flexibility in location.

Today, distance courses are in high demand not only among students, but also among pedagogical associates who need to upgrade their skills and qualification on a systematic basis. Distance courses offer a possibility to choose the necessary knowledge with due regard for all changes in the standards of education and help to grow professional competence (Buyanova & Gorshenina, 2020).With such modes of learning, educators today have vast opportunities for professional growth and successful self-fulfillment in profession (Herzberg et al., 1966), while for novice educators integration in the professional learning space may become more fluid (Falileev et al., 2018), allowing for skills' enhancement without any disruption to the core activity.

Such learning implies feedback from a tutor delivering online training (Tuninga & Seinen, 1995).

Presently there are many modern online platforms of high convenience that may be successfully used for distance learning such as Mirapolis LMS, Moodle, Teachbase, iSpring Learn, etc. These resources provide opportunities for creating e-learning courses, organizing webinars, conducting tests and exams.

Today many teachers start focusing on improving their style and methods of teaching, the times dictate a need to master new resources and technologies, as in the modern system of education only this approach helps to properly adjust to and navigate in the innovative competitive environment (Vardanyan, 2013). Nowadays, it is possible to successfully combine online and offline teaching techniques. Offline techniques help to provide a learner with the necessary materials, create a multimedia base, and ensure a more complete and thorough absorption of the learning content, while also offering a possibility to check progress through tests (Tregubova, 2015). Educational process centers around a learner and the trajectory of his/her professional development, which further will help the learner to implement his/her potential, be more efficient in the chosen activity, find most optimal ways to solve problems and address tasks (Chekushkina et al., 2016).

2 Literature Review

At the present stage of social development, distance learning is gaining popularity and is becoming an important mode of teaching and learning. It has certain advantages: access to education regardless of geographical location; completion and checking of tasks at a convenient time; a possibility to take several courses at once; no limit on the number of entry points, etc. Such researchers as D. A. Golodok and V. M. Alekseev (2016) highlight the following advantages of distance learning: self-sustained learning during courses; use of modern technologies; positive interactions in the process of learning, etc.

The main purpose of this type of training is to engage trainees in cognitive activities, help them acquire necessary knowledge and skills.

In the opinion of V. L. Shatunovsky and E. A. Shatunovskaya (2020), this system of training helps to understand, study and master the theory and methods of solving standard problems; implement correction, self-assessment and performance self-monitoring. Its effectiveness largely depends on the chosen approach to obtain feedback.

The process of distance learning should be transparent and precise. It requires a teacher's strong commitment to designing, drafting, compiling and creating practice-oriented tasks, tests, controls and exam assignments, etc. The learning and teaching support materials should describe goals, objectives, methods, forms, content, duration of a course, the scope of acquired knowledge, as well as joint activities.

The researchers T. V. Glukhova and L. I. Efremova (2019) have analyzed a term mass open online courses, the history of this phenomenon and presented their own experience in this field. This process was first started in 2011 as several courses offered by Stanford University to over 40 thousand people (Lewin, 2012). To date, there are already dozens of platforms for such learning and thousands of online courses around the world. The authors highlight the main features of online learning, the requirements placed on it, and its various applications.

The main problem associated with the development of distance learning is the use of new methods and technologies of learning. This requires a revision of the methods and the model of education, and modes of interaction between teachers and trainees. Creation and implementation of distance learning courses begins with a thorough analysis of goals and objectives, assessment of capacity for introducing new technologies, etc.

The main elements intrinsic to the distance learning are flexibility, modular structure, location independence, mass scale, sociality, internationality, new information technologies, etc. Distance learning broadens access to educational resources; expands the circle of trainees; reduces the cost of education; allows creating unique educational programs and achieving

higher level and quality of education, social and professional mobility, etc. The positive aspects of distance education include: freedom and flexibility, accessibility, individual pace of learning, swiftness, mobility, use of modern technologies, social equity, creativity, etc. Among the negative aspects is the lack of face-to-face communication. Distance learning requires strict self-discipline, self-sufficiency, consciousness and mindfulness (Vodolad et al., 2010).

Another important challenge is the elaboration of rigorous quality assessment criteria for such training systems that are imperative for their further improvement. Currently, this task is pursued by such renowned researchers as P. Brusilovsky (1996), P. N. Vorobkalov (Vorobkalov & Kamaev, 2008). In their opinion, the major focus should be on a multilayer approach which views the final result of learning as a main criterion, but still does not ignore other important parameters, such as functionality, i.e. the capacity to monitor the learner' progress, user-friendliness, accessibility, versatility of multimedia, design, etc.

When studying the paradoxes of distance learning, D. Akhmetova (2007) defined the main components of a distance learning environment: a personal component, which includes cognitive, communicative, organizational and other skills; an informational component based on huge amounts of information, activities of learners and how much of learning content was absorbed; a professional component implemented through self-reflection, rating scores, self-assessment, observations, incentives, etc.; a social and environmental (institutional) component, which is considered in the context of the system of values, traditions, mentality of the society; a material and technical component, which covers technical issues and communication data channels.

Kh. Kuzmin (2004) underlines that educational institutions using high quality information resources and distance-learning technologies may apply those both in higher education and in the qualification upgrade system. Methodological content of distance learning allows for effective application of new information technologies in the process of qualification upgrade. Distance learning provides opportunities to search for new sources of information. Its characteristic features are: openness, swiftness, invigoration, etc. The courses for qualification upgrade have the following objectives: psychological (change of stereotypes); educational (gaining knowledge on new methods and forms of action); informational (conveyance of professional information); consulting (advisory support); research (looking into latest trends in education, pedagogical experience); introductory (introduction of new educational technologies), etc.

Modernization of education has led to radical changes in the functions of a teacher. The shift in educational paradigm draws more attention to the teacher's personality and facilitates transition to individual creative forms and methods of teaching. A system of qualification upgrade is an activity of social education institutes promoting professional development (Makarova et al., 2003).

3 Research Methodological Framework

The purpose was to explore the value and opportunities of distance learning courses in Philosophy in methodological, value-bearing, activity-centered and communicative aspects of the process of educators' qualification upgrade.

The research objectives were as follows:

▪ Explore the essence and dynamics of distance learning;
▪ Analyze content of the course 'The Foundations of the World Religious Cultures' and justify its relevance;
▪ Identify and describe the major approaches to studying the distance course 'The Culture of Professional Communication of a Teacher', and its practical significance;
▪ Identify potential opportunities for qualification upgrade of educational personnel through the study of distance learning courses in Philosophy.

The complexity and multifacetedness of the research subject required the use of the following methods:

▪ A comparative method, through which the knowledge of different types and forms of distance learning is gained;
▪ An axiological method dealing with the formation of values and motivations of a subject of distance activities;
▪ A method of system analysis, which yields a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

4 Results and Discussion

After a study of teachers' competence conducted in 2018, which covered 22 thousand teachers in 67 regions of Russia, S. S. Kravtsov noted that the Ministry of Education and the Federal Agency for the Supervision of Education and Science 'should tranquilly analyze the study findings, render help to a teacher, draw appropriate conclusions regarding the system of pedagogical education and qualification upgrade, so that our system of pedagogical personnel training could become one of the best in the world' (Materials from the website of the Federal Service for the Supervision of Education and Science). Half of the teachers failed the tasks related to the foundations of spiritual and moral culture of the peoples of Russia.

The author and developer of a distance course 'The Foundations of the World Religious Cultures' is E. N. Rodina. The course is offered at the Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev and is available in the distance learning system of this university on the online platform Moodle.

The goal of 'The Foundations of the World Religious Cultures' course is to help students gain a better understanding of religion as a cultural phenomenon, to reveal the essence of the world religious cultures, to develop students' ability to analyze the relationships between the society, the state, the church and believers, and to spur their willingness to see to the spiritual and moral development of their trainees. This course is designed to help teachers strengthen their professional competence and is aimed at further enhancement of their professional skills and pedagogical culture.

The distance learning course 'The Foundations of the World Religious Cultures' is intended to address this problem and is relevant, since it provides spiritual, moral and civic guidance through appeal to the traditions of the peoples of our Homeland. This is not a theological course, but first and foremost a philosophical one, aimed at a deeper study of specific features of different religions, their exploration in the historical context and systematic study not only of doctrines, but also of their impact on culture in general. The program cultivates appreciation of religious values as an integral part of Russian culture, conveys a modern understanding of the Orthodoxy, its doctrine, psychological, gnoseological roots, distinctions from other branches of Christianity, specific features of the cult. In addition, it seeks to present an insightful assessment of the impact the Christianity has had on Russian culture as a whole through the artefacts, such as architecture, music, literature, paintings, as well as philosophical works. It is also possible to study these phenomena in comparative terms, for example, to find architectural differences in temples of different Christian confessions, differences in the traditions of church music. Special attention should be paid to the studying of icons as an essential element and a subject of special reverence in the Orthodox tradition.

In general, the course covers the main directions of Christianity, the Orthodox and the Catholic symbol of faith, the factors and historical conditions that contributed to the emergence of Protestantism, Old Belief, reveals the features of the Russian Orthodox Church, examines the doctrines of Islam and Buddhism, and explores the main branches within these confessions.

The distinctive feature of the program is its student orientation enabled by the distance learning technologies on the educational

platform Moodle, which offers a possibility to complete the program individually under supervision of tutors in charge of the program. The content of the course includes a series of lectures, such as a lecture on The Theories of Origin of the Religion, which provides an overview of different theories in science on the genesis of this phenomenon, its cultural, historical and social determinants.

The author and developer of a distance course 'The Culture of Teacher's Professional Communication' is E. N. Chekushkina. The course will be offered at the Mordovian State Pedagogical University named after M. E. Evseviev and will be available in the distance learning system of this university on the online platform Moodle.

'The Culture of Teacher's Professional Communication' course is intended to develop practical recommendations and requirements for the conduct of a businessman, provide advice and study the ways for improving relationships between people involved in professional activity. The purpose of this course is to elaborate the moral and ethical rules of professional conduct of a teacher, and compel teachers to abide by the standards applied to the culture of professional communication.

The culture of professional communication is a pedagogical technology of holistic personal development. It facilitates the interioration of values and cognition of own self (Habermas, 1995a, 1995b). The culture of professional communication should be pillared on the humanistic foundation of relationships. This course develops the capacity to analyze the ways for improving relationships in various situations of professional communication, to observe the norms and rules of interpersonal interaction, to manage and regulate the moral state of society and personality (Chekushkina & Rodina, 2015).

The culture of professional communication is vital for continuous and sustainable improvement, for life, for spiritual and moral development of personality and society. The rapid development of an innovative society reflects the level of moral development, the degree of assimilation of morals inherent in the culture, the capacity to rely on values, norms and principles in communication and conduct. Healthy climate of business cooperation is necessary for establishing contacts and achieving success in various fields of social activity and social life. The new requirements put forward by ethics relate to the personality, morality and conduct and have a potential to facilitate business communication and render it more effective. Ethical knowledge is necessary for analyzing moral state of the society and resetting its moral orientations (Chekushkina, 2015).

The culture of professional communication sets norms, principles and rules of conduct; assesses the moral state and life of individual and society; reflects the civility of culture; addresses the demands of social progress. The learning process embraces moral assessments, norms, knowledge and ways for their obtaining in the cultural system.

For a modern teacher, the culture of professional communication is highly important and essential in the relationships with other people. It is important for a teacher to intelligently formulate their thoughts, strive to achieve positive interaction and mutual understanding while solving management tasks in various situations, etc.

We suppose that in studying the culture of professional communication of a teacher three approaches should be distinguished: activity-centered, informational-communicative and axiological.

The activity-centered approach has a definite internal structure and is focused on the completion by a subject of an individual program, achievement of goals, fulfillment of motives and values. It serves as a methodological basis and social-philosophical principle; it provides an opportunity to explore, analyze and explain the essence and content of social structures and processes; it implies the communication of an individual

with other people and plays a key role in the formation of an information and communication space.

The informational-communicative approach revolves around the accumulation, diffusion and structuring of knowledge, values, assessments, and is central to the evolvement of integrated cultural systems; it fosters successful communication between cultural subjects, and caters for the adequacy of messages.

The diversity of information resources makes it possible to replenish and catalyze knowledge, to satisfy cognitive interests, to acquire skills for information retrieval, to instill and develop a culture of intellectual work, to strengthen the informational-communicative culture of an individual, to expand the vision and to become a part of the information community (Baudrillard, 1983).

The axiological approach implies self-determination and self-improvement of an individual in the socio-cultural and informational space. It is socially significant and represents a process of norms and values introduction into education. This approach should become a sustainable strategy for the development of modern society based on a conscious choice by an individual of a system of spiritual and moral values.

The distance course "The Culture of Teacher's Professional Communication" includes a system of moral feelings, assessments, attitudes, sympathy, empathy; moral norms, actions, etc.

In addition to the lecture material, the students get competency-oriented tasks that improve the skills of independent work with scientific and educational literature, Internet resources, giving wat to systematic approach to the problems under consideration. Such formats of work may include preparation of essays according to a proposed or independently developed plan, compilation of scientific literature, its review, writing abstracts for scientific papers, drawing up plans of presentations on the designated topics. For monitoring the academic progress, such tools may be used as quizzes, tests, and essays.

5 Conclusion

Qualification upgrade boosts self-discipline, self-sufficiency, intellectual and creative abilities, drives professional growth and successful self-fulfillment. Flexibility of distance learning makes it possible to obtain education, profession and qualification corresponding to the capabilities and needs. In our opinion, the distance learning system for qualification upgrade fosters personal and professional qualities, helps to build an individual development trajectory for a teacher able to work constructively and creatively in the changing socio-economic environment. It helps to build an individual trajectory with account of individual differences for achieving desired results in teaching and mentoring; it is meant to facilitate professional self-education and creative self-fulfillment.

The proposed courses are focused on developing the spiritual and moral sphere, and providing cultural, axiological and ethical training.

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