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TRANSFORMING THE STATUS AND ROLE OF THE TEACHER AT THE INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

TRANSFORMANDO O STATUS E O PAPEL DO PROFESSOR NO INSTITUTO DE ENSINO SUPERIOR NO AMBIENTE DIGITAL EDUCACIONAL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of teachers in the modern educational process. To achieve this goal, a large-scale survey of teachers (N=419) and students (N=1372) was conducted in 2022 at Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (Russia), one of the leading universities in Russia. The research provides insights into the transformation of teaching status and role. The function of transferring theoretical knowledge is gradually giving way to a more student-centered approach, characterized by an increased emphasis on mentoring. The study identifies both traditional and emerging roles performed by higher education teachers in the context of digitalization within the modern information society.

Keywords: Digitalization of education. Digital technologies. Higher education. Distance learning. Information society.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo era investigar o papel dos professores no processo educacional moderno. Para atingir este objetivo, uma pesquisa em larga escala com professores (N=419) e estudantes (N=1372) foi realizada em 2022 na Universidade Federal de Kazan (Região do Volga) (Rússia), uma das principais universidades da Rússia. A pesquisa fornece insights sobre a transformação do status e do papel do professorado. A função de transferir conhecimentos teóricos está gradualmente dando lugar a uma abordagem mais centrada no estudante, caracterizada por uma

maior ênfase no mentoring. O estudo identifica tanto os papéis tradicionais quanto os emergentes desempenhados pelos professores do ensino superior no contexto da digitalização dentro da moderna sociedade da informação.

Palavras-chave: Digitalização da educação. Tecnologias digitais. Ensino superior. Ensino a distância. Sociedade da informação.

INTRODUCTION

With the beginning of the IT century, the teacher was no longer the only source of knowledge (Kist, 2010; Margaryan, Littlejohn, & Vojt, 2011). If the traditional task of the teacher was to transfer knowledge and skills to students, the modern teacher at the university is expected to teach students to acquire knowledge, to form independent educational activities, guide the thinking of students on their own professional development, will be fascinated by the idea that knowledge and skills, which were acquired at the university, will be fundamental for further professional activity (Postman, 1992, 1995; Aleksandrovna, Iurievna, & Olegovna, 2017). Moreover, with the help of new information and communication technologies, it is possible to significantly enhance the content of the educational process, to increase the availability and transparency of information resources and means of communication when using them in the educational process (Davidson & Goldberg, 2009; So & Kim, 2018; Maximova, Eflova, & Kulcha, 2018). Along with the development of Internet technologies, all elements of social life change radically: the economy, politics, education, labor relations, and through this the objectives and goals of the learning process, which determines a significant change in the role of the teacher in the institute of higher education (Deursen & Dijk, 2014).

The modern institute of higher education requires a change in the roles of teachers and students, there is a transition to a form of cooperation and collaborative activity, which purpose is to develop the abilities that ensure effective professional activity. Thus, the teacher and student become partners in the learning process, and the role of the teacher changes from the giver, examiner, supervisor to helper in acquiring of new knowledge and skills.

METHODS

The theoretical approach to the analysis of the transformation of the institution of higher education in the context of globalization was formed under the influence of representatives of the information society and sociologists of global culture. In the works of the American

anthropologist and researcher of global cultural phenomena Appadurai (1996) and the information society theorist Castells (1989, 2004). In their analytical matrix, the authors distinguish three structural characteristics of the cultural and educational process in the context of globalization: transnationalization, self-organization of networks and marketization. The Institute of Higher Education in the context of globalization seeks to self-organization and acts as a system of educational services. This vision of the development of the Institution of Higher Education during globalization determines the content of academic discourse.

In order to identify the ideas of students and teachers at the Institute of Higher Education about the role of the teacher in the modern educational process, sociological study in the form of a mass survey was conducted in 2022. The survey was attended by 1,372 students of the Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, representing various gender and age groups of the student community. A survey of KFU professors was also conducted (n=419). Most of the teachers have more than 16 years of teaching experience (46%), 11 to 15 years of teaching – 18%, 6 to 10 years of teaching – 19%, the rest had less than 5 years of teaching. The results of the research allowed to conduct sociological analysis of data not only in the context of their quantitative assessment, but also qualitative, and to make the following generalizations and conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a survey of teachers on the transformation of their status and role in the context of digitalization, 39% noted the unconditional change in relations between teachers and students associated with the integration of information and communication technologies in the educational process. 42% are not ready to talk about a fundamental change in relations between the participants of the educational process, pointing only to the partial nature of such changes. Only 14% of respondents did not notice the changes that came with digitization.

First of all, there has been a change in the channels of communication with students, which was noted by the majority of teachers (58%): firstly, the channels of communication are now more and more diverse and secondly, the channels of communication that have been created allow contact with students and teachers at high speed and with less restrictions. It leads to more frequent consultations with teachers on scientific, educational, and other

activities, as it no longer requires the expenditure of temporary or other resources, as reported by 37% of respondents.

Most of the new channels of communication become possible because of the Internet, which entails some changes in the way students and teachers communicate, due to the perception of virtual reality as something frivolous, far from the educational process. This impression of the Internet was created at the beginning of its appearance and implementation in social institutions. For a long time, scientists in different fields have ignored the study of Internet practices because of their lack of seriousness. The described attitude towards the Internet and digital technologies is a thing of the past, but its departure can be characterized as rather slow, gradual, and therefore unsurprisingly disturbed in the formal style of communication by students. 38% of respondents complain about this, noting the lack of respect and culture of communication from the students. However, the absence of serious attitude to the Internet as a tool of erasing the boundaries between teacher and student confirms the presence among respondents of 17% who noted the formalization of relations with the arrival of digital technologies in the educational space.

Assessing the merits of digital education, respondents noted faster and easier access to information (51%), easier exchange of information with students (48%), possibility of multiple reproduction (43%), visualization of information (41%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Pluses of the digitalization of education

N	Respondents' answers	Results, %
1	faster and easier access to information	51%
2	easier exchange of information with students (as a comparison with the past)	48%
3	more flexible organization of the educational process	45%
4	the possibility of multiple playbacks of educational material	43%
5	visualization of information	41%
6	increasing student involvement in learning	26%
7	development of a network model of cooperation between institutes/university faculty	23%
8	Lack of control over the teacher's work	14%

As you can see, the greatest number of advantages is allocated by teachers in the field of the opportunities to work with a huge amount of information, which can be presented not only conveniently, but also more quickly and understandably, which contributes to better learning

of the current discipline, including an ability to replay the information countless times. It is worth mentioning that the students are in complete solidarity with the teachers in this matter: diverse presentation of information and its accessibility are also those factors, which implementation contributes improving the teaching status in the eyes of the students.

According to 45% of respondents, more flexible organization of the educational process is also the advantage of digitalization of the educational process. Due to the reduction of time and space limitations, a quarter of respondents noted an increase in the inclusion and involvement of students in the educational process. Digital technologies are actively integrated in university life and change educational settings, but they are also a source of digital inequality (table 2).

Table 2. Minuses of the digitalization of education

N	Respondents' answers	Results, %
1	difficulties with classroom equipment	49%
2	increased number of calls/messages during non-working hours	45%
3	increased time spent with electronic devices	43%
4	unstable access to the Internet	39%
5	decline in the involvement of students in the learning process	38%
6	the complexity of adapting several disciplines to the digital format	36%
7	lack of teachers' knowledge of digital equipment	32%
8	change in teacher-student relations	28%
9	the complexity of the transition to digital education	25%
10	transition to online education	22%
11	lack of control over the teacher's work	14%

According to Table 2, 49% of teachers in KFU note difficulties with classroom equipment, which results in the inability of some teachers of using all the benefits from information and communication technologies. Moreover, there are limitations related to unstable access to the Internet, which were noted by 39% of respondents. While some teachers are dissatisfied with the technical equipment of the university classrooms, other teachers (36%), even with proper equipment, speak about the difficulties in adapting the material to distance or digital format. Almost a third of teachers (32%) believe that informing teachers about capabilities of technical equipment is at a low level, which leads to ignorance of their capabilities and methods of implementing teaching activities. For 25% of teachers, information about university opportunities is insufficient for successful work with digital technologies because respondents

face difficulties in the process of transition to digital education and the development of such a new format. Some teachers (22%) see as a minus the gradual replacement of full-time lessons with online education, in which there is a loss of direct interaction with students.

As the results of the study showed, a certain hierarchy of teachers' roles was formed through self-identification (figure 1).

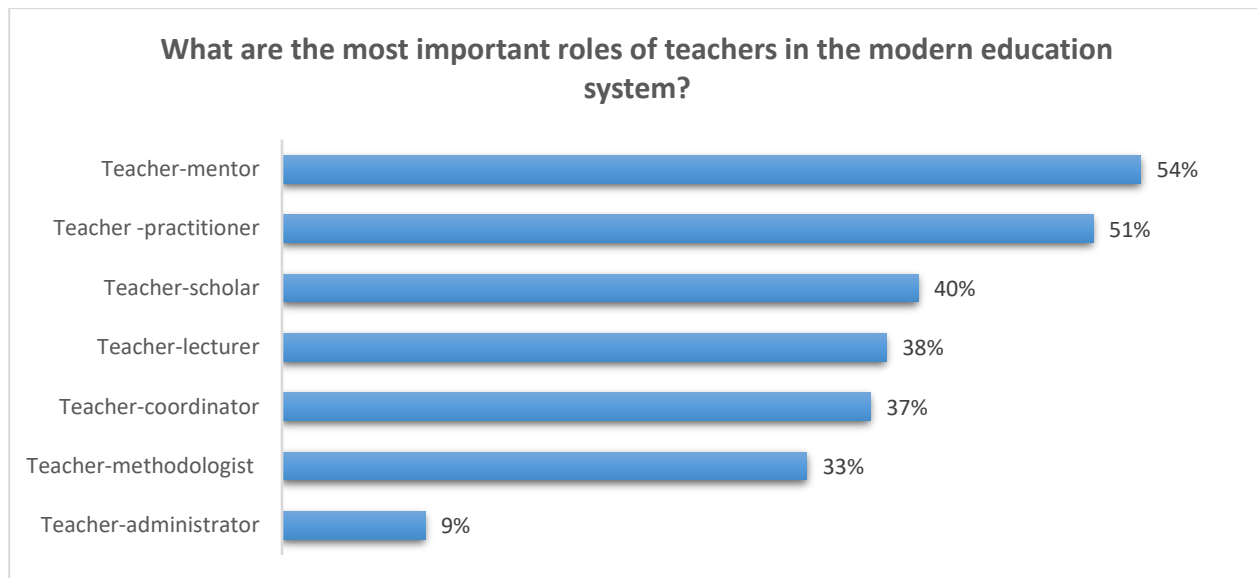


Figure 1. Current roles of the teacher

The leading role of the teacher, according to 54% of respondents, is mentoring, in which the teacher with an individual approach to each student teaches new generations to navigate the information field and develops the personal and professional qualities of students. Half of the respondents also noted the relevance of the role of the speaking teacher as a practitioner. The reproductive method of teaching, the transfer of theoretical knowledge is gradually fading, because the new generation of students has access to scientific information beyond classrooms and university libraries (Voogt, et al., 2017). At the same time, the application of this knowledge, working with the available information as valuable skills in modern realities are no longer so easily acquired outside the lectures and seminars. Nevertheless, teachers do not devalue the role of the teacher as a lecturer, as even the format of lecture classes in a digital environment provides a whole range of opportunities for the translation and implementation of the subject. Also, the changing format of the educational process requires coordination, in which the

primary role is played by the teacher (37%). The rather conservative role of the teacher as a scientist is also important for teachers.

Based on the data, it can be concluded that educators understand the consequences of digitalization, which affects the transformation of teaching status and role. The function of transferring theoretical knowledge is gradually losing ground to a more student-oriented approach, with an increased emphasis on mentoring. Teachers continue to serve as guides between students and valuable knowledge, but the content and methods of the teaching process are changing. It is becoming crucial to teach students how to discern valuable and meaningful information from the vast digital space. Practical application and adaptation of existing knowledge to current realities are gaining importance, necessitating continuous monitoring of new scientific knowledge online and timely updating of teaching materials.

Due to the development and integration of digital technologies at the university, new communication channels were opened for participants of the educational process, they reduced the formality of communication between teachers and students resulting in violation of the working and personal boundaries of teachers, which respondents assess very negatively.

The decline in the prestige of the teaching profession, which was noted by respondents, is largely connected to the digitalization of education. However, despite the perceived weakening of their role in the learning process, respondents tend to be optimistic about the future: by introducing additional courses that could raise awareness of digital equipment of the university, and the level of their mastery, the teaching staff will have more opportunities to facilitate professional activity, increase its convenience, speed, quality, and competence growth through the use of digital media in teaching.

The processes that influenced the transformation of the institute of higher education have also changed the status of the teacher. The traditional form of lectures, where the lecturer tells, and students record, goes into the past. Nowadays there is a need to hold lectures using video, presentations, digital educational resources. Teachers need to tell the unique information that students will not be able to find on the Internet and transmit it in such a way that would be interesting to students (Lai, Khaddage & Knezek, 2017). The status of a teacher is directly linked to the roles they assume. As traditional roles transform in the modern environment, new roles associated with increased workload and responsibilities are emerging, which teachers must adapt to in order to stay relevant and effective (Table 3).

Table 3. Modern roles of a teacher

N	Role	Function
1	Lecturer	Transfer information to students in the classroom or remotely using online environment, presentations, and digital educational resources
2	Scientist	Research, participation in conferences of various levels
3	Ethical teacher	Education of students in accordance with traditional values, norms, and attitudes
4	Moderator	Creation of electronic resources, further work with them and support of students in the online environment
5	Curator	Assistance and support for students in everyday life. The teacher takes the position of an assistant in the search for solutions, helps students overcome everyday difficulties, monitors their attendance, etc.
6	Methodologist	Development of author's approaches and concepts of conducting classes
7	Businessman	Fundraising (grants, business agreements, educational services)
8	Technical specialist	Equipment maintenance during educational process, equipment adjustment, work in various computer programs
9	Consultant	Counseling - mentoring outside the educational process
10	Navigator	Assistance in the compilation of information on the Internet

CONCLUSION

The study results reveal that the majority of respondents consider mentoring as the most crucial role of a teacher in today's educational landscape. The traditional method of transferring theoretical knowledge is losing ground due to the digitalization of education. Teachers are now focusing on helping students navigate the vast amount of information available and apply their knowledge practically. Despite the perceived decline in the prestige of the teaching profession, respondents remain optimistic about the future, recognizing that the mastery of digital tools can enhance their professional activities. The transformation of teaching roles, both traditional and new, is directly linked to the digital age and its impact on the educational process.

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