

## Social Project Planning in the Continuing Education System of the University

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### Abstract

The implementation of social projects is an increasingly popular and effective practice. The subjects of all age groups can be their target audience: from preschoolers who want to promote their creative potential, young people focused on professional self-determination to middle age persons taking interest in the expansion of their information horizons and opportunities of older people who want to address gaps in knowledge in order to adapt to social and technical changes. The paper deals with the problem of andragogic education as a factor of adaptation and socialization of older people who feel fear and uncertainty in the world that is shifting to the common usage of information technology. The purpose of the paper is analysis and description of the process of educational support with the use of social project planning of a vulnerable group of older people. The novelty is practical results obtained on the base of a pedagogical university when implementing socially oriented projects on the generation of computer literacy in older people. The “Available environment: computer literacy improvement” course allows this social group not only to adapt to ever-changing conditions of life but also contributes to their spiritual and physical longevity, social activity and improvement of the quality of life in general. The results and effectiveness of the social project are evaluated using questioning, interview, and observation before and after delivered lessons. The assessment criteria were formed and subjected to adjustment in the course of project implementation and are based on quantity and quality factors. The main criterion was the students’ formed steady motivation to further independent use of the computer, development of computer skills and practical use. Further demand of the course and findings allowed stating the achievement of set goals.

**Keywords:** Social project planning; Continuing education; Computer literacy; Older people; Minin University.



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### 1. Introduction

The new educational paradigm recognizes the subject’s right to actively influence both himself and his social environment. Notably, the subject here is both teacher and student at the same time (Banks, 1997; Berry *et al.*, 2011; Bogorodskaya *et al.*, 2018; Bulaeva *et al.*, 2018). Education quality in the modern world more often determines the quality of life.

The theme of social project planning is the most relevant area of modern pedagogics. Educational space requires modernization, and the method of social project planning seems not only one of the most advanced ones but also sufficiently effective (Britzman, 2013; Vaganova *et al.*, 2017a; Vaganova and Ilyashenko, 2018). Project planning allows simultaneous activating students’ activity, forming a body of necessary knowledge and skills, as well as checking in practice the degree of necessary competences (Vaganova *et al.*, 2017b; Vaganova *et al.*, 2017c).

The competency approach changes the ideology of education content, suggesting the coverage of a wider complex of cultural and educational problems. Project activity allows achieving it (Garina *et al.*, 2017; Garina *et al.*, 2018). It enables the student to independently construct his knowledge and not to obtain them in a ready-made

form, develop critical thinking based on a scientific view of the world, take bearings in complex information space, use creative approaches to the solution of cognitive problems.

The “project” word (translated from Latin “projectus”) means “throw forth”; this is a process of creating a prototype of something. In pedagogics, this is usually students’ independent activity focused on a practical solution of a specific socially important problem (Zeichner and Schulte, 2011).

It is social project planning technology that allows creating such conditions where social tests, check of person’s social opportunities are possible with minimal risk. It ensures the solution of basic tasks of socialization: establishing new necessary methods of social interaction in the ever-changing world, adjusting person’s self-esteem and world view.

Social project planning with pragmatic accuracy makes us not only to identify acute social problems but to suggest the real solution approaches. Besides, it’s advisable to have several such options concerning each matter in question. Thus, social project planning unites learning and mentoring, forming a person’s education.

The main tasks of social project planning in general are:

- development of the sense of responsibility for case together, teamwork ability;
- development of the ability to adequately evaluate yourself and your actions;
- development of students’ critical and analytical thinking;
- development of self-confidence and competences;
- development of research skills (Ilyashenko *et al.*, 2018a; Ilyashenko *et al.*, 2018b).

The successful implementation of a social project is possible when relying on the following:

- voluntariness of participation;
- independence of decision making;
- availability of resources of different types;
- reliance on existing life experience.

Social and education projects in a general way can be considered “a model of human activity itself aimed at the change of social situation” (Ilyashenko *et al.*, 2018c), a method of the use of educational technologies in the course of solving important social problems. The need for society consolidation, adoption and dissemination of socially important values, socialization of different age groups of population, translation of advanced achievements of science and practice – all that determines the focus of social education projects.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The problems of social project planning implementation were previously addressed in the works of R.M. Ambartsumyan, B.V. Kupriyanov, G.A. Luks and others (Calkins, 2014; Ilyashenko *et al.*, 2018d; Ilyashenko *et al.*, 2018c; Kutepov *et al.*, 2017). Researches highlight: a positive feature of social project planning is its universality allowing the use not only at the level of basic educational programs of educational institutions but in the system of continuing education.

Accordingly, its target audience can be the subjects of different age categories with a proactive approach to life, including civil one, with developed responsibility and discipline, the desire to learn something new and use this knowledge. Correspondingly, young people primarily take interest in career-guidance projects, the middle age – in the improvement of knowledge in chosen and related professional areas, and older people take interest in learning skills contributing to adaptation to innovations and new social realias (Campbell, 2014).

Socio-educational events designed for interaction with different professional and age groups take into account the specific nature of the professional activity and regional needs of the population.

Considering the global tendency towards the increase in the length of population life and resulting increased duration of labour professional activity, there’s an increase in the interest of the people of ripe age in mastering latest achievements of mass information technologies.

Recently pedagogs-androgogs have studied the features of teaching elder people in reasonable detail. Thus, the specific nature of the organization of the process of teaching is analyzed in the works of O.V. Agapova, I.V. Vysotskaya, M.E. Elyutina, T.M. Kononygina, E.E. Chekanova, E.I. Kholostova, etc. (Grant and Gomez, 2013; Kuznetsov *et al.*, 2018).

As an educational subject, the adult student has some features claiming attention. They include the awareness of learning purposes, higher motivation, pragmatism, responsibility, having significant sociocultural experience and involvement in a large number of relationships and relations, which often impose constraints on educational opportunities.

Constructing the content and technologies of educational process under these conditions should be based on acmeologic and androgogic approaches within the competence model and mental and action paradigm. The adult student scarcely will be satisfied with the academic nature of the educational process and theory isolation from practice activity.

The range of educational programs’ offers designed for elderly students is quite wide and constantly increases. This tendency has a worldwide nature.

In many European countries (Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, etc.) the government finances the study of older people on the base of local universities. Taking into account the cognitive features of age, excursions, discussions, dialogue learning are used as main teaching methods in English universities. Elderhostel (“hotels for pensioners”) have proliferated in the USA. They combine teaching by university teachers with excursions to interesting and important places during vacations. The Holland government initiated a social project called “Pension in perspective” aimed at teaching new skills people who will retire in the near future (Ilyashenko *et al.*, 2018c).

In the Russian Federation, recently started the implementation of changes in pension legislation, the teaching of older people has become especially relevant. As a rule, it is currently carried out on the base of existing higher education institutions or centers of population social protection. For example, there's "Serebryany vozrast" ("Silver age") multiregion resource center in Saint Petersburg, which provides support not only to older people but also methodical and consulting support to organizations, which work with such people in Russia and elsewhere. In the Republic of Tatarstan, the "Universitet tretyego vozrasta" ("University of the third age") project has been existing for over 10 years with the participation of the department of Pension fund of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Tatarstan and Kazan state medical university.

In the Nizhny Novgorod region, education and awareness courses are arranged in this format on the base of the Center of social public service in the Sarov city. They're aimed at the change of stereotypes of older people's behaviour and life directions. As an alternative, they're offered to study psychology basics, healthy lifestyle, handicraft, art studies. Besides, a regional project called "Elektronny grazhdanin Nizhegorodskoy oblasti" ("E-citizen of the Nizhny Novgorod region") is active in the Nizhny Novgorod region, within the framework of which pensioners are offered to learn the basics of computer literacy.

These projects are consistent with region's social needs for creating open educational spaces ensuring availability of continuing education for various age and social categories of population, strengthening of interaction between generations and support of vulnerable social groups.

Minin University is one of the leading higher education institutions of the region. In 2017, Program of transformation into a university center of social development of the Nizhny Novgorod region was implemented in Minin University (a participant of "Vyzy kak tseny prostranstva sozdaniya innovatsy" ("Higher education institutions as centers of spaces for creating innovations") priority federal project (Markova *et al.*, 2018). According to it, projects in the university are developed aimed at all-round involvement of wider population of the region in the solution of priority problems of the Nizhny Novgorod region and the Russian Federation related to the achievement of sustainable social and economic development.

Working with the elderly became one of the working areas of "Territoriya vozmozhnostey" ("The territory of opportunities") center created here. In order to implement a wide range of education programs on the base on Minin university a number of interested organization of Nizhny Novgorod joined their efforts: municipal self-government bodies, Complex centers of social service of population of Nizhny Novgorod districts, Service for the protection of the rights of financial services consumers and minority stockholders of Volgo-Vyatsky main office of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, Regional organization of veterans/pensioners/war, labour, armed forces and law-enforcement agencies, etc.

According to statistics, about 22% of the population of the Russian Federation are people of advanced age (Maltseva *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, this number is growing steadily, representing the global tendency of population ageing. However, Russian pensioners are certainly behind, for example, European ones by the level of the use of information technology. Only about 9% of them have computer skills (Balashova *et al.*, 2018; Zanfir *et al.*, 2018).

For this social group "Territoriya vozmozhnostey" center developed and implemented the "Available environment: computer literacy improvement" course.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The course program is adapted to the social and legal and psychic age features of the target audience. The maximum number of students in class – 10 persons. Otherwise, it will be difficult for the teacher to pay enough attention to each student. The program is 36 hours by 2 hours 2 times a week.

The course ensured the implementation of the following tasks:

- teaching elderly people primary personal computer skills;
- teaching audience effective and safe work in global network Internet;
- increasing opportunities for communication and obtainment of state services by means of Internet services.

Practice showed that the teacher should follow some rules when teaching older people:

- to support students' positive attitude towards classes, belief in themselves;
- to put an emphasis on that fact that possible difficulties are caused not by learning disability but unknown information and necessary skills being only in the process of formation;
- it's important to show maximum tact to not to accidentally hurt the elder person with a comment;
- to begin teaching with simplest actions;
- comment each new operation in detail;
- in case of difficulties to offer, to show an alternative option to achieve the same effect (for example, to switch language using keys or computer mouse);
- to associate with real common things (recycle bin, folder, bookmarks, etc.).

Each lesson included a theoretical part in the form of a story or a conversation and a practical part including execution of a specific task. Notably, theoretical and practical parts followed one another in the course of lesson period.

Group and individual educational forms were used in class.

During lessons the next forms of work on the computer were allowed:

- demonstrational (students observe teacher's actions);
- synchronous (students simultaneously with teacher and under his control successively carry out actions);
- independent (self-guided work to perform a task given by teacher);

- collective (a leader of small group is chosen among students who organizes other students to perform a task given by teacher).

The majority of lessons had a similar structure, including the following stages:

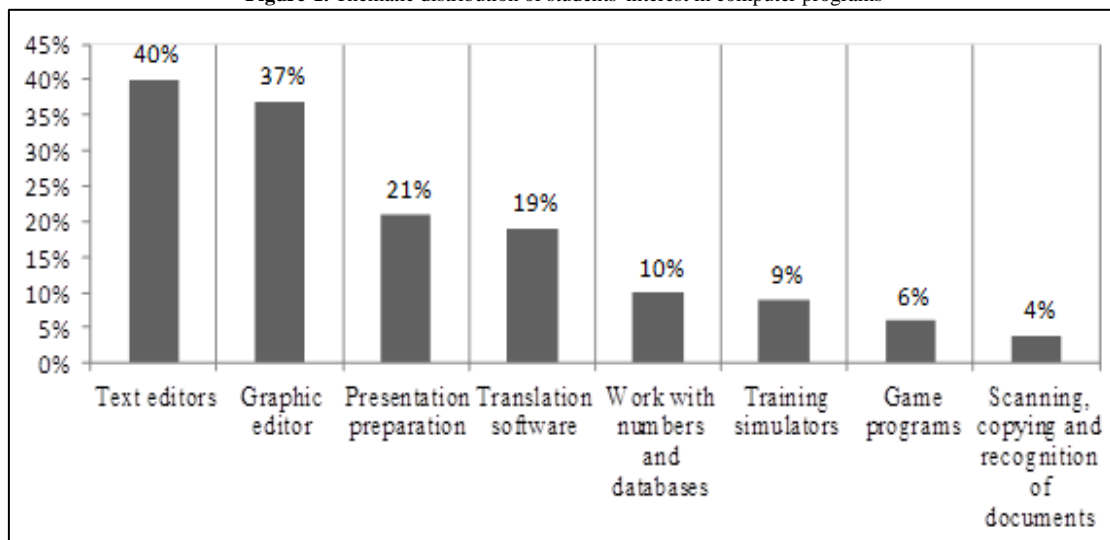
- organizational aspect;
- review of material covered at previous lesson or lessons;
- introduction to new material;
- task performance under the teacher’s supervision;
- independent task performance individually or in a group;
- summing up and answers to questions that arose, discussion of difficulties.

In order to repeat and consolidate material at home, each student is given instruction with a stage-by-stage description of fulfilling of studied issues.

Students were offered to take part in the formation of their own educational trajectory with the help of small closed polling revealing preferable topics for studying.

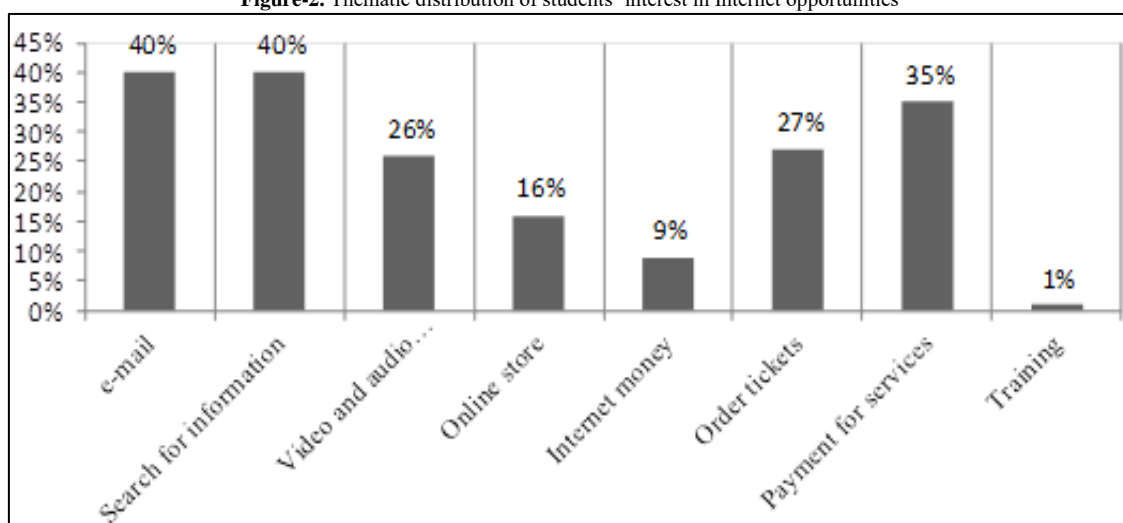
The “What computer programs you’d like to learn” question showed that text editors arouse main interest, then graphical editing programs, then presentation preparation, translation programs, work with numbers and databases and etc. in decreasing order (see Fig. 1.).

Figure-1. Thematic distribution of students’ interest in computer programs



The “What Internet opportunities are the most interesting to you?” question revealed the demand for information search, then email, then opportunity to pay services and transfer data, communication in social networks, Internet shopping and etc. in decreasing order (see Fig. 2.).

Figure-2. Thematic distribution of students’ interest in Internet opportunities



Based on the analysis of obtained data, the thematic plan of lessons was formed.

Lessons were started with teaching correct turning on and turning off the computer, rebooting, introduction to main additional devices of the modern computer, advantages and disadvantages of PC, tablets, notebooks, smartphones, etc.

Lessons were continued with learning to work with Windows operational system, selection and downloading of the necessary program, operations with files, features of their formats.

As basic programs, the audience preferred learning the basics of work with text documents in MS Word and studying the opportunities of the graphical editor of MS Point.

One of the main necessary skills for using the Internet is information search. That's why students were introduced to main search systems, learned how to create requests, review information and save them as bookmarks or files on the computer.

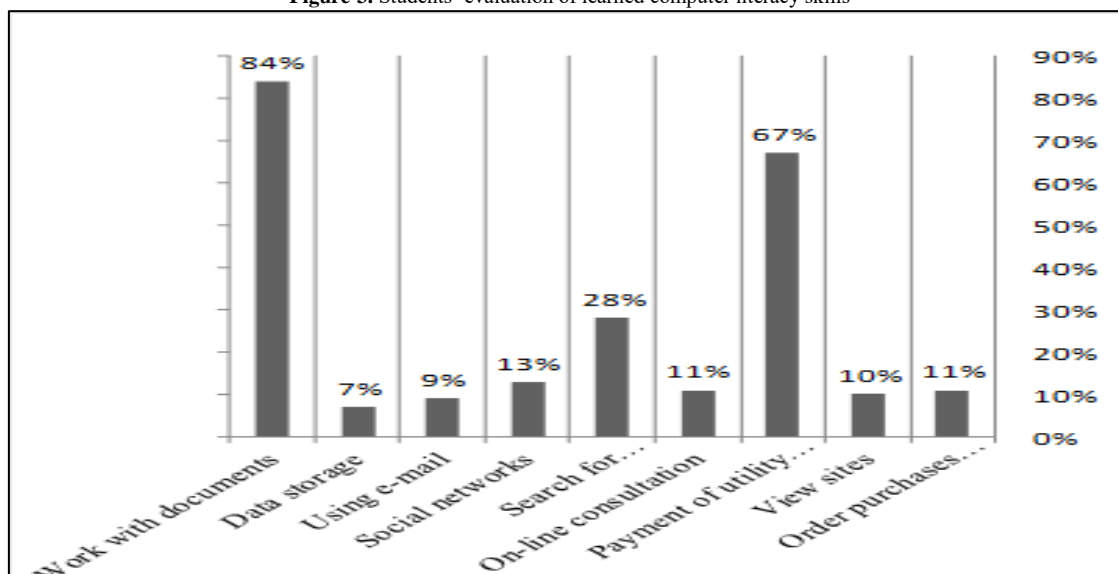
Thus, for example, older people registered and created accounts on sites “Gosuslugi” and “Pension fund of the Russia Federation”. It was discovered that while some of the students were already registered there by social services or relatives, the skills for using these services were absent in the majority of cases. During lessons, pensioners not only get to know main sections and subsections of these sites but also tried at a convenient time and with no queues book an appointment with necessary specialists in a hospital, send counter readings to community services, send a request to the Pension Fund.

Then students mastered communication skills in some popular social networks, at forums and chats. They tried to find people they know there and start communication. They registered emails and wrote emails to each other.

Thus, nowadays many people shop on the Internet and students-pensioners also expressed a wish to get to know some principles of Internet stores’ functioning. A lesson dedicated to the basics of financial literacy in information environment was also delivered within the framework of the course.

To evaluate the degree of students’ satisfaction they were asked the question “What skills have you learned as a result of lessons?”. The polling data are presented in Fig. 3.

Figure-3. Students’ evaluation of learned computer literacy skills



Following the results of the training students noted their positive results and expressed a wish to continue education regarding “Financial literacy” and “Information security”. The students’ growing interest in the capacities of training computer programs was recorded.

#### 4. Conclusion

Modern and effective help to older people cannot be limited to a mere material and financial or medical services. The fast-changing in recent decades world, increasing length of life, later retiring give rise to new social problems in this age group, which relate primarily to the adaptation to occurring changes.

Social project planning in the system of continuing education is an important and real factor of socialization. For older people, computer literacy becomes one of the opportunities for ensuring full life in the modern world. They can remotely or even via video link talk to relatives, book an appointment in a hospital or necessary administration office, ask their questions to a doctor or a lawyer, read their favorite magazine or journal almost for free and discuss information with other people. Productive longevity, the opportunity for personal growth, new opportunities for active lifestyle become more available thanks to Internet technologies.

The content of the “Available environment: computer literacy improvement” course developed in Minin University is firstly aimed at the formation of students’ positive attitude towards this type of knowledge and skills; secondly, it is person-oriented. Taking into account the initial level of knowledge, motivation, individual capabilities, the optimal educational trajectory is being built.

With a minimal amount of study time, the course allowed both studying main opportunities of work on the computer and using them when solving various problems.

Thus, the offered approach and findings indicate the positive experience for all participants of project implementation and allow translation of data to a broad audience.



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