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Scenarios for the Development of Elderly Education in Russia

Сценарии развития геронтообразования в России

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Abstract

The paper delves into the problem of mass education for senior citizens in Russia and assesses the capabilities of the country's system of non-formal elderly education to overcome this problem. It proves the expediency to use the resources of the national education network in social management strategies aimed at increasing the educational level of the older generation. The research demonstrates that it is necessary to purposefully manage the national network of elderly education and forecast the outcome of such an influence. Having analyzed specialized elderly education projects, the authors identify the trends in the functioning of elderly education in Russia and establish the factors in its development. The study provides forecast scenarios for the development of elderly education. Summarizing the scenarios presented, it is worth noting that the government policy will have a decisive effect on the system of elderly education. Undoubtedly, education for senior citizens in Russia will undergo rapid development due to favorable conditions in the country.

Key Words: elderly education, sociology of management, social network, demographic aging, development scenario, forecast model.

Аннотация

Статья посвящена проблеме массового образования пожилых граждан в России. Оцениваются возможности сложившейся в стране системы неформального образования геронтов для решения данной проблемы. Доказывается целесообразность привлечения ресурсов национальной сети образования в стратегиях социального управления, предполагающих повышение образовательного уровня представителей старшего поколения. Обосновывается важность целенаправленного управленческого воздействия на национальную сеть геронтообразования, необходимость проектирования и прогнозирования результатов такого воздействия. На основе анализа деятельности специализированных проектов образования пожилых людей выявляются тенденции функционирования геронтообразования в России, определяются факторы его развития. В ходе исследования строятся прогнозные сценарии развития геронтообразования. Резюмируя все представленные сценарии можно отметить, что определяющее влияние на систему геронтообразования будет оказывать политика государства. В целом сложились хорошие условия для дальнейшего развития неформального образования геронтов. Нет никаких сомнений в том, что геронтообразование в России и в дальнейшем будет активно развиваться.

Ключевые слова: образование пожилых людей, социология управления, социальная сеть, демографическое старение населения, сценарии развития, прогнозная модель.

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Introduction

Currently, society in Russia is quite vulnerable to the global demographic aging trends. According to the World Bank experts, in 2025, the share of people over 65 years in Russia will be about 18% (Ramensky, Ramenskaya & Ramenskaya, 2008). Transformations of the population age structure are observed in different spheres of public life. The most evident negative consequences of population aging are: an increase in the demographic burden, the falling birth rate, and dysfunctions of the institutions of the pension system, social services and healthcare (Sovi, 1977; Sabatini et al., 2017; Watanabe, Miyake & Yasuoka, 2018; Ghosh, 2016). In this context, it is extremely urgent to find ways for adapting society to changes in its age structure (Eakin & Witten, 2018).

The approaches focused on increasing social, economic and cultural potential of the elderly and implementing this potential in various spheres are among the most promising measures to counteract negative consequences of demographic aging (Medaiskis, Gudaitis & Mečkovski, 2018). All of them, in one way or another, are connected with the need to form certain knowledge and skills among a considerable number of elderly citizens (Taziev, 2015; Tan, Ho & Pang, 2016).

In Russia, however, the public system of elderly education has not yet been formed, and traditional educational institutions are unable to cope with the task of raising the educational level of the older generation. Specialized projects of non-formal education are now the main agents for senior citizens' education in the country. Today, there are more than 250 such projects functioning in Russia. More than 100,000 students participate in their programs every year. It is expedient, therefore, to identify the factors that determine the processes of the functioning of elderly education in Russia. The purpose of the study is to construct and justify possible scenarios of the development of elderly education in Russia. To reach the stated goal, we accomplish the following objectives: (a) to collect empirical evidence describing the processes of elderly education; (b) to establish the determinants of the functioning of specialized educational projects; (c) to design a forecast model; and (d) to create possible scenarios of the development of elderly education in Russia.

Literature review

Sovi (1977) predicted today's global demographic situation and population ageing trends away back in the seventies. The researcher views demographic aging as a new challenge of the modern age, to which society has to respond. Barsukov (2019) and Dudko (2016) scrutinize demographic trends in Russia and the contingencies of society's age structure transformation. According to the researchers, the current situation is unprecedented, and there is a lack of effective mechanisms for adapting to the consequences of demographic aging.

There have been numerous studies to investigate possible measures for counteracting negative effects of changes in the age structure (Chahrak & Ugryniuk, 2016; Erokhin, 2018; Ogorodnikova & Kondratieva, 2018; Gelman, 2019). The authors agree on the necessity to attract the social, cultural and economic potential of the older generation to the social management strategies and highlight the critical importance of expanding education programs for senior citizens.

Mosina & Gonezhuk (2019) and Dzhurinskiy (2018) analyze the modern state of elderly education in Russia and explore the trends in its development. They record the stable development of the Russian elderly education, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The researchers underline an increase in the number of specialized educational projects, the rising number of participants in educational programs, and the growing range of educational fields. Kononygina (2006) puts forward possible solutions to the problem of mass education of the elderly. In particular, she grounds the feasibility of the active participation of public authorities in the development of educational programs for the older generation.

Some authors (Mityaeva, Anikeeva & Volzhina, 2019; Mosina & Akhtaov, 2019) study the potential of elderly education as a social management tool. They provide convincing evidence that it is possible to implement vocational training programs for senior citizens within the framework of elderly education projects, and improve their functional literacy and the level of social adaptation.

Several studies (Stepanova, 2015; Suprunenko, 2018) address the aspects of managing the specific segments of the Russian elderly education system. These publications reveal the distinctive features of educational institutions as

objects of management and present unconventional methods for tackling management tasks.

It is worth noting that no attempt has yet been made to produce a scientifically based forecast/scenario for the development of elderly education in Russia.

Materials and Methods

Between 2011 and 2019, we monitored a number of the Russian projects of non-formal elderly education. In the course of the study, we analyzed the activities of 252 institutions from 192 Russian settlements. The primary objectives of the research were:

- to identify the factors that determine the processes of the functioning of these projects;
- to discover the cause and effect relationships between the factors and trends established in the field of elderly education in Russia.

The information base includes the results of the analysis of documents (publications, TV reports, and websites) and data received directly from the organizers of the elderly education projects.

Since this was a longitudinal study, we managed to assess the degree of influence of various factors in dynamics. Based on the causal relationships identified, we designed a forecast model for the development of elderly education in Russia. The methodological framework for producing a forecast embraces the works by Lebedeva & Fedorova (2016) and Pashkova (2006).

Results

The research results suggest that there are two categories of factors – external and internal – capable of affecting the development of elderly education in Russia in the near future.

The external factors are:

1. *Government policy on supporting elderly education.* Policy of the state affects the dynamics of the processes of integration (disintegration) of various educational projects, the focus for the development and functioning of the institution of elderly education, and the degree of assistance of public structures to educational programs for senior citizens. The way in which the

state deals with the problem of elderly education determines public opinion on this issue, including the elderly's ideas about the goals, functions and significance of education at the third age.

2. *The share of people aged 60+ involved in paid work.* Since a significant proportion of students in educational programs are non-working pensioners of the first retirement decade, a change in the given indicator will inevitably affect the quantitative (and possibly qualitative) characteristics of education development.
3. *Social status of the older generation.* This concept implies an integrated attribute of a socio-demographic group of senior citizens, which is expressed in their material well-being, educational level, and subjective respect on the part of society. This factor influences senior citizens' notions of social functions of the older generation, determines the structure and content of leisure activities, indicates cultural and educational needs of the elderly and specifies the possibilities to satisfy them.
4. *Demographic situation.* Population aging has a direct effect on a number of indicators of the elderly education development (for example, the dynamics of specialized educational projects, the number of students covered by elderly education programs, etc.). There are no doubts that the trend towards population aging in Russia will continue; this factor, therefore, can be regarded as a constant and can be left aside when analyzing the scenarios for elderly education development.
5. *Support for elderly education by for-profit and nonprofit organizations.* Projects of elderly education are unable to develop autonomously, with no assistance of organizations possessing the material, human, information and other resources. When assessing the role of sponsors and patrons in the development of elderly education, one should also take into account their motives, which can be either altruistic or quite pragmatic (investing to get profit).

The internal factors include the following:

1. *Motivation of the elderly's educational activity.* Students' motives affect the form and content of educational projects, their goals and objectives. Ignoring the real motives of senior citizens for receiving education can impair the effectiveness of elderly education projects and diminish their popularity among third age people. Student motivation is a product of some other factors, mainly the social status of the older generation.

Russia's current social policy reflects the need for forming a new model of senior citizens' competence designed to ensure their involvement in real social relations and guarantee personal realization in the process of social interaction. Due to the low level of financial awareness and the ever-growing list of financial services and tools, the issue of enhancing senior citizens' financial literacy is becoming increasingly relevant. There are research studies (see, for example, (Litau, 2018)) that substantiate the need for significant changes in teaching methods in order to meet market needs.

2. *Material and financial base of elderly education projects.* Material and financial resources required for implementing the educational process are a significant determinant of the state

of elderly education. Such resources embrace the following: premises rented or owned by the projects; computer and multimedia equipment and devices; and availability of internal sources of funding (partial pay for the educational project; implementation of customized educational programs, etc.).

3. *Staffing.* Professional qualifications of the teaching staff involved in elderly education projects determine the level and quality of graduates' knowledge. Staffing comes to the fore in the context of formal education, which implies acquiring any special qualification by a student.
4. *Goals and objectives of elderly education projects.* This factor is probably the most dependent on all the rest mentioned above. The goals and objectives of elderly education are obviously formed under the influence of government policy and senior citizens' motives behind receiving education. At that, the ultimate goals and objectives are formulated according to the opportunities and resources available to elderly education institutions.

The relationships between the determinants of elderly education in Russia are illustrated in Figure.

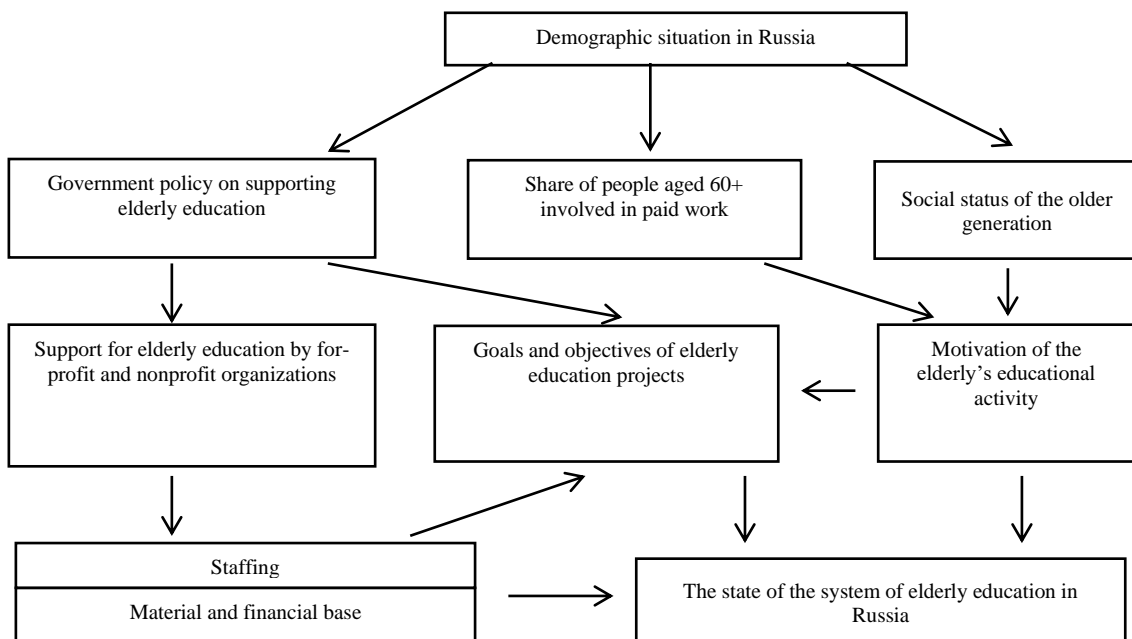


Fig. Relationships between the determinants of elderly education

To simplify the diagram, staffing and the financial base of projects are combined into a single block that can be defined as the “infrastructure of elderly education projects”. The diagram shows that external factors have the most profound effect on the development of elderly education, whereas internal determinants are largely dependent on external ones.

Discussion

The research results serve as the basis for a long-term (5–15 years) forecast for the development of elderly education in Russia. We use the following determinants as forecast variables: government policy on supporting elderly education; the share of people aged 60+ involved in paid work; and the social status of the older generation.

There are three possible scenarios for the development of elderly education: optimistic, pessimistic and realistic (inertial). The latter can be viewed as the most likely in the near future.

Optimistic scenario

The social status of the elderly generation is increasing (currently, there are upward trends in the income of senior citizens and their education level, which may initiate greater social mobility (Driouchi & Gamar, 2017)). The share of employees aged 60+ in Russia is growing (Trofimov, 2017); at the same time, the main incentive for the older generation to keep on working is not the financial situation, but the availability of real conditions to continue their working practice (including skilled labor) for a decent pay. The state considers the training of third age people as a tool for tackling pressing socio-economic problems, and the support for elderly education programs – as investment in human capital. There is a significant increase in the number of the elderly education projects implemented in the form of educational courses. The interest of the elderly in getting education is growing. The share of students aged 60+ in “traditional” institutions of formal education (primarily in universities) is increasing. Paid educational services for senior citizens are gaining in popularity. The major motives for continuing education are associated with increasing cultural demands and popularization of education as a form of leisure; at the same time, the role of motives related to professional activity is becoming increasingly prominent. The growing number of programs is now focused on vocational and advanced training, retraining, and assistance in job search.

Elderly education projects enjoy substantial support from public educational institutions and social protection offices, as well as public authorities. Commercial organizations demonstrate a growing interest in education for the older generation. At that, the overwhelming majority of educational programs use the premises of schools, higher educational institutions, colleges, etc., and hire highly qualified teachers. The goals and objectives of elderly education are mainly connected with outreach activities and leisure time organization. In its methodological and pedagogical qualities, elderly education is almost similar to traditional formal education, but the teaching process takes into account the specificity of the contingent. Most educational programs are concentrated on forming a specific set of knowledge, skills and abilities among students.

Pessimistic scenario

The upward trend in social mobility of senior citizens in Russia is not observed. Despite the fact that the educational level of the older generation is rising, income of the representatives of this group is becoming increasingly differentiated. As a result, the motives for participating in elderly education projects vary significantly (Makreshanska-Mladenovska & Petrevski, 2017). There are two possible motivations behind the elderly’s interest to continue their education: one group of potential students seeks to enrich themselves intellectually and broaden their horizons; for the other group, an educational institution is a place where one can temporarily hide from life’s problems and enjoy pastime. This complicates the design and implementation of specialized educational projects. Whatever form an elderly education project takes, sooner or later it turns into a “hobby club”.

The proportion of workers over 60 is growing due to financial struggles faced by older people. At that, the vast majority of senior citizens are engaged in unskilled labor. Employment growth among citizens aged 60+ affects the quantitative and qualitative composition of students enrolled in elderly education programs. The median age of students is rising, and the share of individuals who are quite socially inactive and bad at studying is increasing.

The official position of the state on the problems of the older generation education is not clearly indicated; however, public policy exhibits a tendency towards treating elderly education as a part of social protection. There is no direct

relationship between the objective of making the older generation more professionally active and uniting the elderly into a special category of adults studying. The major founders of specialized educational projects are institutions of social protection. Their material base and personnel are used in the educational process. To a certain extent, projects are funded by non-profit and public organizations, but the scale of this support is more than modest and does not have a noticeable effect.

The primary goals of specialized projects are the prevention of incorporation and social exclusion, extension of the period of independent living, adaptation to the state of old age, and organization of leisure activities. Elderly education develops within the framework of social pedagogy. The main forms of educational projects are clubs and lecture courses.

Realistic (inertial) scenario

The level of income and education of the elderly is slowly but steadily increasing. The image of the older generation is no longer associated with helplessness and poverty; however, senior citizens still occupy minor social roles, and their cultural, social and professional potential is underestimated and not entirely realized. The proportion of workers over 60 is increasing; the main reason for that is the availability of free time and residual ability to work. Government policy on elderly education is ambiguous. The state supports the idea of educating people at any age, but there are no long-term programs on the development of elderly education. Support for elderly education is regarded as a social responsibility of the state.

Elderly education is highly dependent on its sponsors, which are mainly government agencies and non-profit organizations. The material base and staff composition of the projects are heterogeneous and determined by the size and the nature of sponsorship.

The principal reason for the elderly to continue their education is to satisfy their needs for leisure. Obtaining education is a rest with benefits, an opportunity to receive useful or simply interesting information, and a training of mental functions.

The goals and objectives of educational projects are associated with increasing social activity and social competency, as well as sharing knowledge and learning skills useful in everyday life. One of the primary objectives is to integrate the elderly

into the education space and form their attitudes towards lifelong education. The number of specialized educational projects and the number of their participants are increasing. Projects are implemented in all possible forms, but the tendencies of the formation of elderly education are determined mainly by the activities of universities of the third age (Ignatjeva, Volosnikova & Efimova, 2017; Volchik & Maslyukova, 2017; Aleksejeva, 2016).

Conclusion

Currently, the Russian society is in line with global demographic trends and is experiencing their negative consequences. In this context, the use of social, cultural and other resources of senior citizens is a necessary condition for the adaptation of society to new demographic realities. The problem of improving the educational level of the older generation is becoming especially urgent. It is important, therefore, to examine the determinants of the functioning of the elderly education system, establish the opportunities for influencing its development process and produce relevant forecasts. To summarize the presented scenarios for the development of Russia's elderly education system, we should emphasize that the government policy will play a crucial part in its evolution. Undoubtedly, education for senior citizens in Russia will undergo rapid development due to favorable conditions in the country.

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