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## Intergenerational Discourse on the Problems of Russian Education and Creation of Bilingual Environment

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**Abstract:**

*The relevance of the research problem stems from the specificity of the system of fundamental education in the 21st century, which implies a capacity of educational establishments not only to provide knowledge to the student, but also, due to the continuous and rapid emergence of new knowledge, to shape a need in ongoing independent absorption of knowledge throughout the entire life.*

*An important role in this process is played by the consideration of opinions not only of young generation which is the main target of educational institutions, but also of people of all other ages who become active subjects of the educational process.*

*The paper objective is to reveal pressing challenges associated with reformation of the Russian system of education through the intergenerational discourse. The main method used for research was the representative mass survey of population of the Republic of Tatarstan.*

*The research results helped to identify the intergenerational peculiarities of assessment of such aspects of the education system, as a possibility to obtain appropriate education and knowledge; a possibility to fulfill oneself in the profession and study; impact of education on personal social promotion; implementation of bilingualism policy in the educational system of the republic.*

*The intergenerational dynamics of educational level across the respondents as compared to their parents is also presented in this paper.*

**Keywords:** Intergenerational discourse, education, reformation, generation, bilingualism.

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## **1. Introduction**

Based on the research results, the educational sphere at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by a growing value of formal education almost in all countries (Maximova *et al.*, 2016). Formal education in the educational establishments, which issue an official document to certify the education level, on the one hand, is an important attribute of the higher social status, as especially noticeable on the intergenerational level. But, on the other hand, the formality quite often has a negative aspect either, such as negligence of the quality and the content of the received education, and in particular, the received knowledge.

A modern consumer of educational services is focused to a larger extent on obtaining practical, utilitarian knowledge, skills and competences, and to a lesser extent - the universal theoretical knowledge. In fact, in the modern context the formal education gains system-shaping importance both for the economy and the society as a whole. Education becomes a major factor of transformation of the modern society into a new state, characterized as “post-industrial”, “informational”, “knowledge society” (Bell, 1973; Masuda, 1983; Castells and Himanen, 2004; Mansell, 1998).

Over the past two decades the Russian system of education has been undergoing a cardinal transformation associated with such formal changes, as introduction of the unified state exam for all secondary school graduates, transition to a two-tiered system of higher professional education within the frames of the Bologna process, and the resultant changes in the content of education. As a matter of fact, a system of formal education, which existed in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, was deconstructed, while the new principles are only emerging and a period of adaptation is under way. One of the main principles driving the changes in the sphere of Russian education at the institutional level is the dominance of economic criteria over the social life, which sets in motion transition from a wider culture-centered approach in the education to the economy-centered understanding of educational activity and its products. The economy-centered approach stems from the pragmatic utilitarian understanding of education by the employers as a certain, quite narrow, combination of knowledge and practice-oriented skills of the university graduates.

The social purpose of education in its classical understanding, as was typical for the Russian society earlier, fades out. Formation and development of personality, its socialization, social adaptation and positive identification cease to be the educational value orientations of high priority. In such a situation the analysis of intergenerational discourse on assessment and perception of the system of education itself and its impact on the society as a whole and an individual in particular draws attention of the researchers. It shall be noted that the notion “discourse”, which is widely used in social and humanitarian sciences, has different interpretations. Discourse in its most general sense may be understood as a special method of

communication and understanding the surrounding world or any aspect of it (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). In the concept of Foucault (1972), recognized in most modern discourse analyzing approaches, discourse is defined as a series of statements limited by the rules existing in certain communities. By generalizing the discourse interpretations used in the modern sociological and social theories, Van Dijk (2000) distinguishes the following meanings of discourse: discourse in the broad sense means a complex communicative event; discourse in the narrow sense means a text or a conversation; discourse as a type of verbal product; discourse as a genre; discourse as a social formation meaning sociocultural peculiarities of the communities; discourse as a mechanism of ideological socialization.

In our study the intergenerational discourse on the problems of the Russian education is interpreted as relevant and reflecting at the macrosocial level the sociocultural phenomena and processes as a product of communicative action, coherent by its semantic value with the views of the representatives of different generations.

## 2. Literature Review

The problems of education reformation both at the national and the global level are explored in many papers. Thus, Altbach *et al.* (2009) note that starting from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and through to the present time, the education system in most European countries has been undergoing permanent changes. In his opinion, these changes were to the large extent triggered by globalization and liberalization of markets, new socio-economic and political realities. One of the possible solutions to these problems in the Western European countries was reorganization of the university sector based on the concept of “new public management” (NPM). This concept, which was extensively applied in other areas of the public sector, was transferred to the sphere of the higher education in order to improve the efficiency, productivity, transparency, competitiveness and market-orientation of the universities (Boer and File, 2009; Gorina, 2016; Guskova *et al.*, 2016).

The experts examine certain aspects of transnational education development in the present world, rendering special attention to the problem of preserving national educational traditions, *inter alia*, at the intergenerational level (Jongbloed, 2009; Philipidou *et al.*, 2004; King, 2017). Lemistre (2009) focuses on the phenomenon of “education expansion” over a short historical period in the modern Western European states. He is contrasting positive economic and negative social effects of this process: production systems’ structuring, a range of macroeconomic effects and at the same time devaluation of diplomas and social declassifying in the second generation. Analysis of socio-economic effects of the described phenomenon is carried out using the terms “school (educational) inflation” and innovative economy.

The phenomenon of higher education expansion, which negatively affects the intergenerational social mobility, is observed in the modern Chinese society, as

applicable to the post-80s generation. Empirical studies reveal educational, career, ideological, life-style and family patterns typical for this generation (Hua and Qian, 2016).

The researchers note that in the modern information society a need in basic competencies is transversal and transgenerational (Bélanger, 2015). Special emphasis is placed on the relevance of the concept of education throughout the entire life. Thus, the system of national education shall actively engage representatives of older generations in the educational environment. A significant number of publications are devoted to various aspects of the use of new technologies in the educational process with due regard for the sociocultural differences between the students (Collin and Karsenti, 2013; Hensley, 2018). The specifics of different learning methods has been analyzed from the point of view of efficiency of such methods use for various age groups (Dimaggio *et al.*, 2004; Cheong, 2008; Bennett *et al.*, 2008).

The authors pay special attention to the educational programs for representatives of the older age groups (older than 65 years) as an important factor of their social inclusion (Kämpfen and Maurer, 2018). A group of French scholars (Paola *et al.*, 2016) carried out the panel study of students for 20 years (1995-2015). They highlighted the fact of strong correlation between school performance, orientation towards the higher education and the specific choice of specialty (professional specialization), and social origin of the students, in particular, dependence on the socio-professional status and the level of education of their parents. Based on the empirical results the evolution of phenomenon of inequality in education, which has social and ethno-cultural roots was analyzed. Based on the results of mass representative survey of France population, Régnier-Loilier (2005) explored the “portraits of families” through the prism of family and intergenerational relationships. He revealed that the educational strategies remain over generations an important factor of social inequality. The survey data also confirms the growing importance of social origin in relation to such stages of “life history”, as the end of studying, first job (employment) and creation of a family.

The same conclusions were arrived at by the American and Canadian researchers based on the longitudinal mass surveys of the youth during the transition period (2000-2005). Among those youngsters who entered the universities the majority have parents with the diplomas of higher education. The researchers carried out the comparative analysis between educational strategies, preferences, performance and results upon completion of education among two categories of students: “in the first” and “in the second generation” (Kamanzi *et al.*, 2010). In general, we may say, that the intergenerational differentiation between educational practices and assessments of the system of education up to date has been studied only partially. The Western European and American authors examine a problem of intergenerational discourse in education mostly in the context of two-pair (parents - children) generations within the same family (Sánchez *et al.*, 2018; Lange and von Werder, 2017).

### **3. Research Methods**

The research team with the immediate participation of the paper authors carried out a sociological survey in September-October 2017 in the form of a representative mass survey of population in one of the regions of Russia, which is most developed in socio-economical terms, - the Republic of Tatarstan with the bi-ethnic population (represented by the Russians and the Tatars). The survey representative sample included 1480 persons. The obtained data was processed and analyzed using the data statistical processing program SPSS 20.0. One of the research objectives was to analyze a state of the educational sphere in the modern Russian society, and, in particular, the problem of formality and affordability of high-quality education to different generations of the Tatar society.

The research target was the population of the Republic of Tatarstan. The research subject matter was the generational discourse on assessment of the problems faced by the Russian education. The research tolls included a mass survey questionnaire, broken down into the following thematic blocks:

- assessment by representatives of various generations of a possibility to get appropriate education in the modern conditions;
- assessment of educational reforms implemented in the Russian society, including – implementation of the provisions of the Bologna Declaration, transformation of the bilingualism policy;
- optimal ways to combine educational needs of different age groups.

The research results were analyzed in the context of age factor, which helped, among other things, to identify the peculiarities of the intergenerational discourse on the challenges of the Russian education.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

Out of 1480 respondents surveyed in the Republic of Tatarstan 669 persons were Tatar (45.2%), 613 persons were Russian (41.4%), and the rest represented other nationalities, that corresponds to the distribution of the said parameters in the general totality. Among the respondents it is possible to single out the generation “of stable 2000s” - people aged under 24 (16.1% of respondents) and from 25 to 34 (21.2%); the generation of “perestroika and reforms” - people aged from 35 to 44 (17.5%); the generation of “stagnation” - 45-54 years (16.1%) and 55-64 years (14.5%); the generation of “thawing” aged 65 years and older (14.5%).

The possibilities to get good education in the modern conditions of the market economy are directly correlated with the financial position, despite preservation of the public education sector funded from the national and regional budgets. From this point of view the population of Tatarstan may be in general described as the solvent consumers of educational services, since most respondents assess their financial

position as positive: half of the respondents (49.6%) noted that they have enough money for food, clothing, household appliances, and only highly expensive purchases (such as a car, an apartment) are unaffordable to them, while 7.1% may afford almost anything. Less than a third of respondents (27.9%) believe that they have enough money to buy food and clothing, but they cannot afford household appliances and delicious meals. Only a relatively small fraction of respondents (12.8%) have money enough only to buy food and maintain minimum subsistence level, and 2.6% noted that they do not have enough money even for food.

Thus, the financial position of the surveyed Tatarstanians, may be in general described as positive and conducive to acquisition of the high-quality education. One of the objective factors essential to a good education is the capacity of the existing system of education to satisfy demands of the consumers of educational services. The survey results demonstrated that most respondents (73.7%) are satisfied with a possibility to obtain appropriate education and knowledge (34.9% believe that there exists a good possibility, and 32.7% assess it as satisfactory). Only one tenth of the respondents (11.2%) assess their possibility to get appropriate education as poor, and 18.9% were undecided.

The intergenerational dynamics of responses to this question is as follows: Most optimistic in their assessments of possibilities to get the proper education and knowledge are the young age groups. The middle-age generation is more reserved in its assessment, while most respondents in the elder age groups gave negative assessments and were undecided. Most undecided respondents belong to the age group over 65 years (50.6%), which may be explained by their distancing from the problems in the sphere of education: for most of them their working career is over, there is no need to improve qualification; and the issue of education for children is no longer relevant. This fact indicates that the concept of lifelong education and universities of the third age, which is effectively implemented in economically developed countries, has not yet found its active application in Russia.

At the same time, with account of the ongoing pension reform which assumes substantial increase in the pension age, this problem is highly urgent. As indicated by Carr *et al.* (2018), the lifelong education helps the elder generations to keep solid positions on the job market, improves the standards and quality of their living. The similar assessments in the context of the generational discourse were given by the surveyed Tatarstanians regarding a possibility for self-fulfillment in profession and learning: 35.5% of respondents assessed this possibility as good, 39.6% as satisfactory, 9.2% as poor and 15.7% were undecided. According to the obtained results, young generations to a larger extent tend to assess their chances as good and satisfactory. At the same time the reduction in positive assessments has a clear correlation with the older age of the respondents, and reaches its minimum in the eldest age group: only 10.2% of the respondents over 65 years old assess their possibility for self-fulfillment in profession as good, and 15.7% as satisfactory.

Results of the mass survey demonstrated that the level of formal education of children is higher than the educational level of their parents. Among the young age groups the share of those who have incomplete secondary education is significantly less (3.4% of children, and 22.8% of parents), while the number of respondents with higher education is higher (27.5% of children and 13.3% of parents). The positive finding is that there were almost no respondents with the incomplete secondary education in the sample, which indicates the universal coverage of the Russian citizens with the basic secondary education.

Insignificant intergenerational changes occurred in the group of respondents with general secondary, secondary professional education, and the surveyed Tatarstanians holding an academic degree, which, in our opinion, is a sign of certain dynastic legacy in the circle of highly qualified workers, and in the academic community. A significant portion of the surveyed Tatarstanians noted that their education contributed or was rather likely to contribute to their social status (67.6%), and every fifth respondent (18.4%) found it difficult to assess the impact of the obtained education on the personal social promotion. Interestingly, but in this case, no clear generational correlation in responses to the questions was found.

The analysis of the obtained data through the prism of age factor revealed: 1) the eldest age group of respondents (65 years and older) gave a rather contradictory assessment of the impact of their education on their personal social promotion: 58% of them gave a positive answer, and 33.3% (the highest percentage among all respondents of all age groups) were undecided; 2) in the middle age groups, which represent the economically active population, a direct correlation is observed between the age of respondents and their unconditional positive assessment of the impact of education on personal promotion; 3) uncertainty and many undecided respondents among the young age group (16-24 years) may be explained by objective facts: the respondents of this age group have not yet completed their professional training or have small professional experience, which prevents them from giving a definitive answer on the degree of impact of the educational factor on their various social achievements; 4) the share of respondents sticking to an opinion that their education had no impact on their social status is small in all age groups, and does not exceed 10%. The survey helped to identify a big share of respondents who expressed their opinion on existence of vast opportunities to get high-quality education in the present-day conditions.

According to the assessments given by the respondents, the biggest opportunities to get high-quality education in the Russian society are found in the system of preschool education (39%). Half of the surveyed Tatarstanians (47.6%) believe that there is a possibility to get high-quality preschool education, but it is low. There are no considerable differences in the assessment of possibilities to get high-quality school and professional education (good possibility - 34.6%, low possibility - 53.2% with regard to the school education, and 30.9% and 49.6% respectively with regard to the professional education). The primary analysis of the obtained data revealed no

specifics in assessments and opinions of the respondents depending on the age factor.

The respondents were more critical in assessing a possibility to exercise their right to get free education, which earlier, during the Soviet period, was guaranteed to all citizens. Only every tenth respondent (11.7%) pointed to existence of big opportunities for exercising this right in the modern conditions. In the light of the reforms undertaken in the recent years and aimed at reducing the number of budget-funded places in the educational establishments of all levels, it may be assumed that the number of Russians, assessing the possibility to exercise this right as low, will grow. Among the most significant factors, preventing, in the opinion of the respondents, accomplishment of the life goals by young people in our country, are the laziness of most young people (53.3%), low demand for young people on the job market (42.2%), overall social and economic situation (26.3%), inaccessibility of high-quality education (21.8%), infantilism, pamperedness (21.8%), no state policy on support of youth (21.6%), passivity of the modern youth (20.8%), low intellectual development (18.8%).

Survey results revealed rather critical self-assessment impeding accomplishment of life goals by the young respondents. They first of all highlight subjective parameters: laziness of young people (54.8%), passiveness of modern youth (28.3%), infantilism, pamperedness (24.8%), low intellectual development of youth (22.4%). The important objective factor impeding accomplishment of life goals by the youth, in their opinion, is only the factor of low demand of youth on the job market (38.6%). The opinion of the young Tatarstanians regarding the low demand most probably reflects the aspiration of young people to get well-paid job without proper qualification and job background. The youth prefers unemployment to the low-paid job. The surveyed Tatarstanians, who by their age may be referred to the generation of the parents of modern youth, see as the most significant factors the laziness of most young persons (62.2%) and low demand for the youth on the job market (38.5%).

The significance of objective factors impeding accomplishment of life goals by the youth in our country is increasing in the older age groups. An assumption can be made that the respondents assess the chances of life success of youth by making a comparison with their life chances in the Soviet period. A specific regional problem of the system of education in the Republic of Tatarstan is the implementation of the bilingualism policy. According to the survey results, the knowledge of the Russian language is almost one-hundred percent: fluently speak, read and write in Russian 96.3% of all respondents, including 98.5% among the Russians and 94.3% among the Tatars.

The differentiation in knowledge of the Russian language by generations is noticeable. If almost all people of young and middle age have a good knowledge of Russian (from 97.9% among those who are under 24 years of age to 96.6% among

45-54 year olds), among the elderly (over 55 years) there are still some people who did not manage to learn Russian at a good level (6.1-6.5%). The highest number of respondents experiencing difficulties with the Russian language is in the group of 35-44-year old respondents (1.9%) and the respondents older than 65 years (2.3%).

A different, asymmetric, situation is seen with the Tatar language, recognized as the second state language in the Republic of Tatarstan. 35.1% of respondents believe to be fluent in the Tatar language, while in this regard there is a noticeable shift in the ethnic origin of the respondents: such proficiency level is typical for 65.3% of the Tatar respondents and only 1% of Russians. Though in the Republic of Tatarstan all children through to 2018 were taught the written language, quite a considerable portion of the Tatars know their native language only as spoken 17.1% (which is 1.7% among the Russians). 8.7% of respondents may speak, but with some difficulty, including 10% of Russians and 7.5% of Tatars. 21.6% of Russians and 9% of Tatars understand the Tatar language, but don't speak it. And 1.1% of Tatars and 65.7% of Russians do not know this language at all. Thus, the bilingualism problem remains unsolved, mainly in the Russian context.

Comparison of respondents by age shows that the fluent knowledge of the Tatar language is demonstrated by young and middle-age generations (from two thirds to three fourths across these generations), while among the elderly respondents (over 65 years) there are only 46.7% of fluent speakers, which is explained by poor attention to learning the Tatar language, and the decline in significance and loss of some social functions by the non-Russian languages during the years of "thawing" and "stagnation". Fluency in spoken language is demonstrated by 10.1% of respondents without any prominent distinction by ages. As concerns the responses "I speak the language, but with difficulty" and "I understand the language, but cannot speak it", here we see the inverse relationship between the choice of such responses and the age (for the first response - drop from 17.3% among young to 2.8% among elderly respondents; for the second response - 27.8 and 5.7% respectively). This is predetermined by birth of young people in the city, and the inefficient, but compulsory, studying of the Tatar language at schools, the graduates of which enter the society with poor knowledge of the Tatar language on mass scale.

The role of one of the most important channels for reviving functions of the Tatar language in the post-Soviet period was given by the Tatarstan authorities to the sphere of school education. Throughout all schools the curricula were introduced with "equal timing" for both languages, up to 6 hours per week, and consequently the number of hours of Russian language at school was reduced from 1200 to 700 per annum in average, causing a growing discontent among the Russian-speaking parents and children over the recent 25 years. In July 2017 the President of the Russian Federation Putin Vladimir Vladimirovich raised an issue of a need to refuse from compulsory studying of non-native languages to the detriment of the Russian language. Initiation of discussion at the political level changes the attitude of population to this problem. Thus, to a question "What is your attitude to a problem

of the Tatar language teaching in the educational institutions of Tatarstan?” included in our survey in autumn 2017, the response “The Tatar language shall be compulsory studied by all students, regardless of their ethnic origin, on par with the Russian language” was chosen only by 4.2% of Russian respondents and 24.9% of Tatars, though in 2011 the percentage was 14% and 44% respectively (Maximova *et al.*, 2017).

A response “The Tatar language shall be compulsory for all students, but shall take less time than the Russian language” was chosen by 15.8% of Russians and 22.8% of Tatars. While the statement “The Tatar language shall be studied by the Tatars compulsory, and by students of other nationalities only by their own choice, optionally” was chosen by 27.3% of Russians and 22.3% of the surveyed Tatars. The response “The Tatar language shall be studied only by own choice, optionally, regardless of ethnic origin of the students” was preferred by 46.9% of the Russian respondents and 23.8% of the Tatars. Thus, the surveyed Tatars fell into 4 categories, roughly equal by size, with regard to the directivity and compulsory studying of the Tatar language by everyone, whereas the vast majority of Russians are unwilling to learn the Tatar language.

It is interesting to note the distribution of responses depending on the age of respondents. The percentage of those who chose the first response increases with the increasing age, starting from the 55-year olds, and among the elder generation reaches a quarter of respondents, because these people did not evidence a period of revival of the Tatar language and culture. 18.7% of respondents offer to keep the Tatar language as a compulsory subject, but it shall take less time in the curriculum than the Russian language, and here is seen the increased percentage of 35-54 year olds, most of whom learned the Tatar language during the years of perestroika.

The response assuming the compulsory nature of the Tatar language only for the Tatar children actually has no correlation with the age of respondents. But the response “The Tatar language shall be studied only by own choice, optionally, regardless of ethnic origin of the students” is differentiated depending on the age of respondents: from 40.9% among the young to 27.0% among the elderly respondents. This phenomenon is explained by rejection by the recent students of the Tatar language teaching methodology, which includes spelling, syntax, orthoepy, grammar, and other theoretical fundamentals of disciplines taught at universities, but not the conversational Tatar language. Thus, we see that the solution to the problem of implementation of the bilingualism policy in the system of education of the Republic of Tatarstan needs further elaboration.

## **5. Conclusions**

The primary analysis of the research results led to the following main conclusions:

- the research revealed both positive and negative assessments of the objective and subjective factors impacting the condition and developmental prospects of the modern Russian education;
- in certain cases the substantial differences were identified in the opinions and assessments of the respondents depending on the age factor;
- a negative trend was revealed in assessing the accessibility of high-quality education, especially, in the sector of public education funded from the state budget, and not from own funds of the students or their parents;
- in the modern Russian society the priorities are gradually shifting and expectations of the consumers of educational services are changing: the formality of education becomes increasingly important, while the importance of the quality of education is relegated to a secondary role, which is especially typical for the young generations;
- globalization in the field of school education was reduced to an idea of compulsory learning of both state languages of the Republic of Tatarstan at the level of political decisions by the regional authorities.

The research revealed prevalence of negative attitudes, especially among the Russian population of the republic, towards compulsory learning of the Tatar language by all students at schools. In general, the results obtained by the research of the intergenerational discourse on the problems of the Russian education have facilitated the development of further research strategy intended to reveal apparent and latent functions of the Russian educational institutions and peculiarities of perception and assessment by different generations of changes occurring in the educational sphere.

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