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THE OPEN INFORMATION SPACE AND THE GLOBAL INTERNET AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE INFORMATION SOCIALIZATION OF LEARNERS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract. This article examines the role and pedagogical significance of an open information space and the global Internet in the process of the information socialization of learners in the 21st century. It presents theoretical approaches to developing learners' information literacy, critical thinking, and digital responsibility. The article clarifies the relationship between the general concept of socialization and its informational dimension, identifies the main directions in which the open information space influences the development of the learner's personality, analyzes the educational opportunities and the risks of the global Internet, and substantiates a system of pedagogical mechanisms through which schools, families, and teachers can organize safe and productive information socialization.

Keywords: information socialization, open information space, global Internet, digital environment, learner's personality, information culture, information literacy, digital competence, information security, critical thinking.

Introduction

As is well known, one of the defining features of social development in the 21st century is the rapid advance of information and communication technologies and their deep penetration into every sphere of human life. Digital technologies, the global Internet, social networks, and electronic information resources are fundamentally changing how people acquire knowledge, communicate, exchange social experience, and make sense of the world. For the younger generation in particular, the open information space has become a significant social and pedagogical factor in the process of socialization.

Today's learners grow up in an environment in which a considerable part of their communication, learning, leisure, and self-expression takes place online. The boundary between "real" and "virtual" life is increasingly blurred: friendships, social roles, value orientations, and even patterns of behavior are formed under the simultaneous influence of the family, the school, the peer group, and the digital environment. For this reason, the question is no longer whether the information space affects the formation of the learner's personality, but how this influence can be understood, guided, and used for educational purposes. The concept of "digital natives" proposed by Prensky [5] drew early attention to the generational gap in technology use, yet later research has shown that growing up with technology does not in itself guarantee the ability to use it critically, safely, and responsibly [3; 4; 8].

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The open information space creates for learners a virtually limitless source of knowledge and opportunities to broaden their worldview, develop their creative potential, and increase their social activity. At the same time, this environment also contains risks, such as unreliable information, manipulative content, harmful material, cyberbullying, and the unlawful dissemination of personal data. Consequently, organizing the information socialization of learners in a pedagogically sound manner and forming in them the skills of searching for, selecting, analyzing, and safely using information is one of the most pressing tasks of the modern education system. The aim of this article is to reveal the essence of information socialization, to analyze the role of the open information space and the global Internet in this process, and to substantiate pedagogical mechanisms that make it safe, effective, and developmental.

The open information space as a modern factor in learners' socialization

Socialization is the process by which an individual assimilates the values, social norms, rules of behavior, and relationships accepted in society. In the course of this process, a person acquires social experience, becomes aware of his or her place in society, and develops the ability to act independently. Classical approaches emphasize that socialization takes place through observation, imitation, and interaction with significant others [6] and within a system of nested social environments, from the immediate setting of the family and school to the broader cultural context [7]. The digital environment has become a new and powerful layer of this system.

Information socialization, in turn, is interpreted as the process by which an individual actively participates in the information environment, uses information resources, enters into communicative relationships, and assimilates digital culture and information behavior. In other words, it is the part of socialization in which information, and the channels through which it is created, transmitted, and received, become the main medium for acquiring social experience. It covers not only access to information but also the formation of habits of evaluating sources, of communicating ethically, of protecting one's own data, and of taking responsibility for one's digital footprint.

In the 21st century the open information space has become an important structural component of this process. Through the Internet, learners can obtain information about different countries, peoples, cultures, scientific discoveries, and social phenomena. Unlike traditional sources, which were selected, filtered, and adapted by adults, the open information space is largely unmediated: the learner is often the first and only "editor" of what he or she reads, watches, and shares. This increases opportunities for independence, but it also shifts the responsibility for quality control to the learner, which is why the level of his or her information culture becomes decisive.

The influence of the open information space on the socialization of learners can be seen in the following directions:

– **Broadening knowledge and worldview:** learners independently acquire knowledge about various sciences, cultures, and social processes. Access to museums, laboratories, lectures, and archives from around the world allows them to go beyond the content of the school curriculum and to form a more complete picture of the world.

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– **Communicative development:** through virtual communication tools they exchange ideas with peers and with representatives of different countries. This develops communication etiquette, foreign-language skills, and intercultural sensitivity, and teaches them to express and defend their own opinion in a respectful manner.

– **Independent learning:** they use electronic libraries, educational platforms, and video lessons. The ability to choose the pace, time, and form of learning supports the development of self-regulation and lifelong learning skills.

– **Creative activity:** with the help of digital tools they create new products, projects, and creative works, from presentations and videos to simple software applications, blogs, and digital art, and they receive feedback from a wider audience.

– **Social activity:** they take part in various social initiatives, educational projects, and collective activities, such as volunteering campaigns, online communities of interest, and joint research projects, which strengthens civic awareness and a sense of belonging.

Thus, the open information space expands the learner's opportunities not only to acquire knowledge but also to gain social experience, express his or her opinion, and develop as a person. It should be stressed, however, that these opportunities are realized only when the learner has the necessary level of information literacy and when the adults around him or her support the process pedagogically. Without such support the same environment can just as easily lead to superficial consumption of content, social isolation, or the adoption of destructive models of behavior.

The educational potential of the global Internet

The global Internet is an important information and communication tool of the modern process of education and upbringing. Its possibilities can serve the intellectual, spiritual, creative, and communicative development of learners. Several aspects of this potential deserve particular attention.

First, the Internet expands opportunities for acquiring knowledge. Through electronic textbooks, scientific articles, video lectures, and distance learning platforms, learners can independently enrich their knowledge. Open educational resources reduce the dependence of learning on the place of residence and on the material resources of a particular school, and they make it possible to personalize learning, allowing a learner to return to difficult topics, to study in more depth the subjects that interest him or her, and to prepare for further education. In this sense the Internet helps to reduce educational inequality, provided that access and the ability to use it are available to all [3].

Second, the Internet develops the communicative competence of learners. Through virtual cooperation, group discussions, and online projects, they gain experience in exchanging ideas, substantiating their point of view, and working in a team. Joint work with peers from other regions and countries teaches learners to take different perspectives into account, to negotiate, to distribute roles, and to bear responsibility for a common result, that is, the very skills that are regarded as key for the 21st century. Learning communities and "connected learning" environments, in which interests, peer

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support, and academic achievement are linked, have been shown to increase motivation and engagement [9].

Third, the global Internet creates opportunities for developing creative and innovative thinking in learners. The use of digital presentations, video materials, programming tools, and artificial intelligence technologies helps learners to demonstrate their creative potential. Learners move from the role of passive consumers of information to the role of its producers: they design, model, test, publish, and receive feedback. At the same time, new technologies such as generative artificial intelligence raise new pedagogical questions about authorship, academic integrity, and the verification of generated content, which makes the development of critical and ethical competences even more important.

Fourth, the Internet supports the upbringing function of education. Through digital libraries, virtual excursions, and online cultural and historical resources, learners become acquainted with the national and universal heritage, which can strengthen national identity and respect for other cultures if this work is purposefully guided by teachers.

Risks of the open information space and the role of information culture

However, effective use of the positive possibilities of the Internet depends directly on the learner's culture of working with information and on his or her digital competence. The European Digital Competence Framework treats digital competence as a complex of knowledge, skills, and attitudes covering information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem solving [1; 2]. A learner who has mastered only the technical side of this complex remains vulnerable.

If a learner does not possess the skills of assessing the reliability of information, comparing different sources, and drawing independent conclusions, then false information in the global information environment may negatively affect his or her worldview. Research shows that even young people who are very active online often judge the credibility of a website by its appearance rather than by checking who stands behind it, and that strategies such as "lateral reading", leaving the page in order to check the source elsewhere, are far more effective than simply reading the page carefully [8]. In this respect, it is necessary to develop in learners during Internet use not only technical skills but also information-analytical and critical thinking abilities.

The principal risks that accompany the open information space can be grouped as follows. Content risks include unreliable and false information, propaganda, manipulative messages, and harmful or age-inappropriate material. Contact risks include cyberbullying, grooming, and contact with strangers who conceal their real intentions. Conduct risks arise when learners themselves publish offensive content, violate others' privacy, or infringe copyright. Contract and privacy risks involve the unlawful collection and spread of personal data, hidden commercial influence, and fraud. In addition, there are health and psychological risks, such as Internet dependence, sleep disturbance, and reduced attention span resulting from constant notifications. Large-scale studies of European children show that opportunities and risks are closely connected: the more children use the Internet and the more skills they acquire, the more

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opportunities they enjoy, but the more risks they are also likely to meet [4]. This finding is pedagogically important, because it indicates that the solution is not the prohibition of Internet use but the development of resilience and competence.

Pedagogical mechanisms for safe and effective information socialization

The cooperation of the educational institution, the family, and teachers is of great importance in ensuring the safe and effective socialization of learners in the global Internet environment. The following mechanisms may be regarded as the main ones:

– **Developing information literacy.** This includes teaching learners to formulate an information need, to search in different databases and search engines, to evaluate the author, purpose, date, and evidence behind a source, to compare several sources, to cite them correctly, and to respect copyright. Information literacy should be integrated into subject teaching rather than taught as a separate, isolated topic.

– **Forming digital culture.** Digital culture implies norms of online communication ("netiquette"), respect for the dignity of other people, responsible behavior in social networks, and awareness that a digital footprint is long-lasting. It is formed through discussion of real cases, role-play, and the personal example of teachers and parents.

– **Developing information security competence.** Learners must know how to protect personal data, create strong passwords, recognize phishing and fraud, set privacy parameters, and respond to cyberbullying, including whom to tell and how to report harmful content. Such competence should be practiced, not merely explained.

– **Developing critical thinking.** Tasks involving fact-checking, analysis of media messages, identification of manipulative techniques and logical errors, and comparison of opposing viewpoints teach learners to ask questions about information instead of accepting it automatically. Problem-based and project-based methods are especially effective for this purpose.

– **Strengthening cooperation between family and educational institution.** Parents need pedagogical and digital education of their own. Joint meetings, consultations, and recommendations on children's online activity, together with shared family rules for the use of devices, make the educational influence of the school and the family consistent.

– **Creating a positive digital environment.** Educational institutions can develop safe school platforms, recommend verified educational resources, support student media and digital projects, and encourage constructive online communities, so that the learner's activity is directed to useful and creative purposes instead of simply being restricted.

The effectiveness of these mechanisms depends on taking into account the age and individual characteristics of learners, supporting their independence, and ensuring a balance between pedagogical control and trust. Excessive control and prohibition tend to push young people toward hidden and unsupervised Internet use, whereas a trusting dialogue encourages them to seek adult help when they

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face a problem. The degree of supervision should therefore decrease gradually as the learner grows older and demonstrates responsibility, while the learner's own capacity for self-regulation increases.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the 21st century the open information space and the global Internet have become one of the important factors determining the information socialization of learners. The digital environment creates for learners opportunities to acquire knowledge, broaden their worldview, enter into social communication, develop their creative potential, and participate in global information exchange. At the same time, false information, harmful content, cyberbullying, violations of the privacy of personal data, and Internet dependence existing in the open information space increase the need for the pedagogical management of learners' information socialization.

The analysis shows that the quality of information socialization depends less on the amount of technology available than on the level of the learner's information literacy, critical thinking, and digital responsibility, and on the consistency of the educational influence of the school, the family, and the teacher. Therefore, the main strategic direction is not to isolate learners from the information space but to prepare them to live and act in it competently, safely, and ethically. Further research may be directed to the development and experimental testing of age-specific programs of information literacy, to the diagnosis of the level of learners' digital competence, and to the training of teachers and parents for pedagogical support of children's digital life.

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