

EAST EUROPEAN SUBGROUP OF IFETS: THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNET-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROJECT REALISATION

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Abstract — *This paper describes our experience of international internet-based educational project realization. The name of the project is East-European Subgroup of International Forum on Educational technology & Society. Proposed paper possesses the integrated nature. General reasons of Subgroup creation and aims of Subgroup initiators are considered, main Subgroup activities are described in detail, results achieved during working on project are enumerated. The paper provides analysis of discussion material of Subgroup teleconferences. This analysis shows that the Subgroup audience are mostly interested in the questions related to the distance forms of education and Internet-based learning technologies.*

Index Terms — *Internet-based educational project, Internet-based forum, Distance education.*

INTRODUCTION

Problem description

At present applications of information technologies to the learning process are emerging as global trend of education development. Internet has proved to be a key player in this process, providing main infrastructure for interactive information exchange in the modern society. Within this framework research is being done in several directions, demanding special attention on the part of scientific community. Among them, there is a need for integration in two specific ways. On the one hand, it is important to increase interaction between the specialists in information technologies and the specialists in pedagogy. On the other hand, we need reinforcement of international contacts between researchers from different countries, realisation of co-operative projects, directed towards the development of new information technologies for education. It has a particular importance for the countries, such as those from East-Europe, which are beginning to join the International information space.

Aims of project creation

These are precisely the ideas that initiated the basic motive for creating East-European Subgroup of International Forum on Educational technologies & Society (IFETS) in 1999 in Kazan (Russia). The main language of Subgroup is Russian. The main aims of the project encompass the creation of mechanisms for integrating and distributing results of East-European scientists' researches. Moreover, it is directed towards initiating collaboration of East-European

specialists among each other and with their Western counterparts. The collaboration is understood as scientific, creative, co-operative and facilitating interchange of new business-like ideas, based on the realisation of common projects.

Today urgency of progress in these directions is obvious. Rapid development of technologies in all human activity fields puts great demand on the quality of education. Increasing quality of education is impossible without improvement in teachers' skills and application of new information technologies to the learning process. Project described here will undoubtedly help in this way, since professional growth of a teacher (consequently progress of whole education system) is possible only through dialog, collaboration, and discussion of education problems with colleagues.

SUBGROUP ACTIVITIES

Project supports integrated solving of problems, which are put above, i.e. various complementary activities jointed by the same idea are being conducted within the framework of the Subgroup.

Teleconferences

There are teleconferences among them, which are devoted to modern problems of education. Teleconferences are divisible into two types: moderated (conducted by guidance of moderator in predesigned period and with predesigned theme) and immoderated (emergent spontaneously and regulated by nothing besides general rules of conducting discussions). This activity is one of the most important ones. First, teleconferences provide initiators with some kind of feedback. Initiators can realise members' opinions concerning this or that Subgroup actions by the mean of discussions being conducted in the Subgroup. Second, teleconferences play role of the source of very important information about most priority and actual directions in the area of information technology of education. On this basis it is possible to determine what problems are "hot points" for audience of Subgroup.

In addition, though the channels of teleconference initiators provides regular distribution of news (conference announcements, informational letters with job opportunity in foreign institution and another useful information).

International Journal on Educational Technology and Society

The second main activity is the publishing of East-European section of International journal "Educational technologies & Society" (ISSN 1436-4522). The journal is published four times a year. At present Subgroup has published four issues of journal. It contains full and short papers, software, website and book reviews and summaries of the most interesting and successful discussions being conducted in the Subgroup. All publications undergo an expertise.

Subgroup Website

The official website of Subgroup (<http://ifets.ieee.org/russian/>) is the source of various information concerning area of information technologies of education. (See figure 1). It contains the base of links to the websites, devoted to educational projects, institutions and scientists working in this area (about 100 links), archive of translations of advanced foreign authors' papers (all translations are published on the site only with authors' permissions), information about conferences and many another helpful data.



FIGURE 1. THE MAIN PAGE OF THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE OF EAST-EUROPEAN SUBGROUP OF IFETS

SOME RESULTS OF SUBGROUP ACTIVITY

Now Subgroup has been functioning actively for more than a year. It was preceded by a half year of organisational and preparatory actions. This section contains description and brief analysis of some results of Subgroup activity being achieved during this period.

Results of Subgroup activity have been evaluated on the basis of a number of quantitative responses.

Today the total number of registered members of Subgroup is about 200. Among them there are 157 representatives of higher education (including 35 full professors, 37 assistant professors, 25 postgraduate students, 9 graduate students), 9 officials of secondary school, 18 representatives of business structures.

While work on the project four issues of journal have been published. More than 30 papers have been submitted, 23 papers have been accepted.

More than 100 letters with information about foreign conferences and job opportunities have been sent. Overall volume of discussion material has exceeded 300 letters.

Results achieved in such field of activity as supporting and developing of the official website of Subgroup have been evaluated on the basis of data, provide by the SpyLog system. SpyLog is the Internet-based system collecting and processing various statistic information concerning registered web-based sources. According to the reports provided by the Spylog system since the middle of August, 2001 more than 3000 of unique visitors from 48 countries have been attending the official website of Subgroup. Among them there are 2361 visitors from Russia, 261 from the Ukraine, 112 from another countries of formed USSR. There are registered numerous visits from the western countries (USA – 93 visitors, Germany – 46, Canada – 32). Distribution of visitors according to their cities is following: Moscow – 1236 visitors, Saint-Petersburg – 106, Novosibirsk – 98, Krasnodar – 64, Kazan – 55, Kemerovo, Rostov-na-Donu, Stavropol, Tomsk – about 50, Yoshkar-Ola, Samara, Omsk, Chelyabinsk, Veliky Novgorod, Ekaterinburg, Vladivostok – about 30 (in all about 90 cities). First place of Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Novosibirsk can be explained first of all by the fact, that these cities contain large amount of purposeful audience of the Subgroup, as well as by high-level technical equipment of this audience (as regards Internet connection).

Investigation of attendance statistics has shown that the audience of teleconference are quite actively reacts to the various actions provided by Subgroup. Peaks of visitors' activity correlate with activity of Subgroup and correspond with time of regular journal issue publishing, regular translation appearance etc.

Statistics of distribution of attendance according to the time of day has shown that the site of Subgroup has been attended the most often from 10 a.m. to 18 p.m. according to Moscow time zone. This is not surprising, since the main part of website audience are users, who are from European region of Russia and from the Ukraine. Analysis of reports has shown that in the long run fluctuations of attendance diagrams (dispersion) have been decreasing, but average value (mathematical expectation) during the day has been increasing. Extreme index of attendance during the week equal 104 visitors from 18 to 24 of September, 2000, during the day one equal 31 visitors on 18 of September, 2000, during the hour one equal 6 visitors from 14 to 15 p.m., 13 of December, 2000.

One of the most informative reports of the SpyLog system, which reflects the dynamics of website audience variation in the best way, is presented by the figure 2.



FIGURE 2. REPORT “SIZE OF AUDIENCE”

This diagram demonstrates the fact, that total number of unique visitors attending website for 30 days has almost doubled from the beginning of November, 2000 to the beginning of January, 2001. At that time graph reflecting variation of the kernel of audience (this parameter equals a number of visitors visiting website on the average not rarely then once a week during the period not less than two months) is approximately on the one level. This fact shows us that website has its own stable audience. Some reduction of diagram during the period from the middle of December, 2000 to the middle of January, 2001 is explained by the fact, that this parameter has some part of inertia and in this period it continue to reflect quite evident decreasing of members’ activity for New year holidays.

ANALYSIS OF SUBGROUP AUDIENCE’S PREFERENCES

During the year Subgroup has been conducting several formal and informal discussions. Overall volume of discussion material (as it was mentioned above) has exceeded 300 letters. The analysis of this material has been provided. Purpose of analysis was to realise what kind of questions are mostly interesting for the members of Subgroup, what problems concerning to information technology of education are collecting the largest audience for discussion.

Provided analysis has shown that the most actual for educational community today are the problems of distance education and various Internet-based technologies used for educational purposes.

Members of Subgroup have demonstrated the greatest activity while discussions concerning to the problems of distance education in some respects have been conducted. Quantitative analysis of all discussion material has shown that more than one half of all letters are devoted to these questions in one way or another. Two of four informal discussions being conducted in the Subgroup were related to various aspects of distance, open and long-life learning. Formal discussions have been generating the largest amount of information in the fields adjacent to distance education and Internet. For example, during the teleconference, concerning to the electronic textbooks participants have given the most attention to the discussion of various instrumental tools of web-based learning courses and Internet-based technologies of learning process organisation.

According to the results of provided analysis initiators have reached a decision to concentrate the Subgroup activity on the problems of distance education. At present several actions in this direction are prepared. The new list of discussions is formed. Special issue of “Educational technology & Society” journal devoted to the problem of distance and open forms of education is going to be organised. The official website of Subgroup will soon contain special page concerning to these questions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered in detail activity of East-European Subgroup of International Forum on Educational Technology & Society. Some results being achieved during the working on the project have been described. Provided analysis of discussion material of Subgroup has shown that the most actual for audience of Subgroup today are the problems of distance education. In this connection initiators have been planning a number of actions aimed at the detailed coverage of these problems.

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