

## ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В ЦЕЛЯХ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ

## EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Original article

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### The Value of Subject Olympiads for Modern School

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The article reveals the values of the modern school, taking into account the impact of the negative consequences of a paradigm shift in the perception of the world in the eyes of society. The phenomenon of the Olympiad movement is considered in the context of the cultural approach – the Olympiad as an instrument for the development of creative abilities of schoolchildren – and at the same time as a system exposed by school and society. The functions and values of education are considered, the purpose of the study is refracted in the analysis of their perception in the eyes of school teachers at a cut-off of 30 years. The research methodology is based on the relationship of axiological, culturological, informational, systemic and activity approaches; as methods, we used reading scientific literature on the topic, classification, generalization (theoretical), questionnaire of teachers (empirical). As part of the study in 2022 and 2023 we held meetings with teachers from different regions, including the following: Lipetsk region, Kemerovo region, Moscow region, the Republic of Mari El, the city of Moscow. The survey sample was presented by 236 teachers from these subjects of the Russian Federation. As a result of the study, it has been revealed that attitudes towards the values of school education changed in the eyes of teachers. Destructive social tendencies found refraction in reducing the role of independent thinking and a solid foundation of knowledge, which was partly the result of a change in the pedagogical paradigm in the country, the transition to the Bologna process in higher education, intensive standardization, the introduction of the Unified State Exam. The positive side of the present is the high cognitive and creative activity of a significant part of students – students and schoolchildren. Analysis of the goals of school education through the prism of official documents and opinions of teachers indicates that in the context of transformational processes, the school has a fairly powerful resource in the form of a mass olympiad multi-subject and multi-level movement, allowing each student to train and use their mental strength and abilities in the olympiad marathon.

**Keywords:** Olympiad of schoolchildren, values of education, modern school, preparation for Olympiad, Olympiad movement

## Научная статья

### Ценностный смысл предметных олимпиад для современной школы

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В статье раскрываются ценности современной школы с учётом воздействия негативных последствий смены парадигмы восприятия мира в глазах социума. Рассматривается феномен олимпиадного движения в контексте культурологического подхода – олимпиада как инструмент развития креативных способностей школьников – и одновременно, как система, подвергающаяся воздействию со стороны школы и общества. Рассматриваются функции и ценности образования, цель исследования преломляется в анализе их восприятия в глазах школьных учителей на срезе 30 лет. Методология исследования основывается на взаимосвязи аксиологического, культурологического, информационного, системного и деятельностного подходов; в качестве методов нами использованы анализ научной литературы по теме, классификация, обобщение (теоретические), анкетирование учителей (эмпирические). В рамках исследования в 2022 и 2023 гг. нами проведены встречи с учительской общественностью из следующих регионов: Липецкая область, Кемеровская область, Московская область, республика Марий Эл, город Москва. Выборку анкетирования составили 236 учителей из данных субъектов РФ. В результате исследования выявлено, что отношение к ценностям школьного образования в глазах учителей изменилось. Деструктивные общественные тенденции нашли преломление в снижении роли самостоятельного мышления и прочного фундамента знаний, что отчасти стало следствием смены педагогической парадигмы в стране, переход к Болонскому процессу в высшей школе, интенсивная стандартизация, введение ЕГЭ. Позитивной стороной настоящего времени является высокая познавательная и творческая активность значительной части обучающихся – студентов и школьников. Анализ целей школьного образования через призму официальных документов и мнений учителей указывает на то, что в условиях трансформационных процессов школа располагает достаточно мощным ресурсом в виде массового олимпиадного многопредметного и многоуровневого движения, что даёт возможность каждому ученику тренировать и применять свои умственные силы и способности в олимпиадном марафоне.

**Ключевые слова:** олимпиада школьников, ценности образования, современная школа, подготовка к олимпиаде, олимпиадное движение

**Introduction.** The transformation Russian society and its institutions – economic, cultural, industrial, educational, etc. – started undergoing in the mid-1980s received a new impetus and continued development during the transition period (the 1990s), intensified during the global financial and economic crisis (2008–2012), and has to date acquired the features of global risks, axiological crisis, digitalisation threats, deepfake technologies [1]. What has emerged is a VUCA world; fluxional, unstable, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Further transformations have led to a change in the paradigm of perception of reality from a VUCA world to a BANI world, where the acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity), coined in the 1980s, denotes the complex and changeable nature of social relations, and BANI means the complete chaos of any systems. First introduced into scientific circulation in 2020 by the futurist Cascio [2], the concept of the BANI-world (brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible) preceded the coronavirus pandemic and the threats of

global conflict that became clear in 2022. Domestic education, with its humanistic values, and emphasis on humanitarianism, peacemaking potential, continuous professional development, and holistic development of the individual, ended up at the conflict “node” of problems of a sociocultural nature.

In the context of two competing labour market tendencies – increased competition in the labour market, which demands good education and constant professional development from its participants, and the low chances of landing a stable job (which has been a major factor in reducing motivation and interest in work and social support) – there is a need for new social protection programs for the population and updated curricula for professional and secondary education. In Russia, the situation created by global risks has found a solution in a set of national projects for 2017–2030: “Education”, “Digital Economy”, “Science”, “Labour Productivity and Employment Support” – focussed on creating a single educational space and strengthening its

role in the formation and development of national educational spaces and their harmonious convergence [3].

The destructive nature of transformational processes is shaped by the dominance of centrifugal tendencies (anti-values), whilst one of the prerequisites for the harmonious, balanced development of society and its institutions is the consolidation of axiological, economic, technological, cultural, and, most importantly, educational resources that ensure continuity at all educational stages. The liberal-democratic values of the transitive period of the development of Russian society were based on the principle of individual freedom and free personal and public choice; however, the resulting ideology failed to take into account that an increasing degree of personal freedom means that the problem of self-realisation is solved not so much through the acquisition new knowledge, but through qualitatively restructuring human activity into a mode where those experiences which lay down the basis for the formation of an individual culture and a personal system of knowledge come to the fore [4].

**Materials and methods.** The **methodology** of this study follows V. V. Krayevsky's four-level system-structural methodology of pedagogical research, encompassing the philosophical, general-scientific, concrete-scientific and technico-technological levels, including interdisciplinary research in which axiological, cultural, informational, systemic and activity-based approaches are closely intertwined; an integrative approach; the dialectical principle; and the principle of the subject in education.

The culturological approach as the application of M. S. Kagan's systematic approach [5] to the philosophy of culture is understood in this study to manifest itself in the interrelation of the following concepts: a) culture as a human activity with its inherent ontological status and characteristics including environmental problems; b) values (mental, spiritual, practical) which are consolidated in the context of the relationship between the values of scientific knowledge and the values of learning in the context of the didactic principle of science; c) the dual nature of the individual as both the creator and the product of culture, shaped through the processes of their personal development and assimilation of culture; d) the connection between school curricula and information (spheres of knowledge covering subjects such as nature, society, technology, human life, modes of activity, art).

Our **research methods** are based on the principles of scientific knowledge, i. e.: relevance, determinism, complementarity, consistency and include:

- theoretical methods (analysis; the systematic method; a revue and generalisation of the literature on the research topic);

- empirical methods (study of documents on education and normative materials on education, questionnaire/survey of school and university teachers, statistical processing of the results of the questionnaire and survey).

As part of the study in 2022 and 2023 we held meetings with teachers from different regions, including the following: Lipetsk region, Kemerovo region, Moscow region, the Republic of Mari El, the city of Moscow. The survey sample was 236 teachers from these subjects of the Russian Federation.

**Results and discussion.** The past decade (2012–2022) saw a change in economic scenarios; particularly manifest has been the “from economic to forceful” scenario, in the context of which major “breaks with tradition” take place in the wide socio-cultural space “world – city / place of residence – work – creative and professional contacts”. The global community, as a new scale of human freedom, makes the individual's life and course of action depend on many conditions and circumstances which require functional literacy in various areas of life and activity to navigate and overcome – this is when forging international contacts and forming a deep understanding of the meaning of communication (whether with other people, technology, or art) require contextual appropriateness from the subject's self-expression [6]. Currently, “a new gap means a rejection of the scientific-critical thinking characteristic of the twentieth century, and the choice is instead made in favour of a new (“digital”) irrationalism of the information age”; we note that this leads to the growth of totalitarian tendencies in neoliberal societies and the use of “artificially created conflicts” based on communication (political and pseudo-humanitarian programs which are marked by a shift in values and a pseudo-humanist rhetoric) as a form of verbal interaction in order to replace outdated economic and social levers [7]. This points to a growing role of the languages of science, art, culture (material and spiritual) in the post-globalisation world, creating a need for the skills of polysemantic interaction at the level of general literacy, functional literacy, and sociocultural literacy. If the concepts of gener-

al/elementary literacy and functional literacy of schoolchildren are sufficiently developed, the concept of “sociocultural literacy” emerged relatively recently. What is understood under the ‘socio-cultural literacy’ of a school student as an integrative concept in the research community is the inter-relation of language and scientific literacy, ICT competence, and socio-cultural competence [8].

In the dynamic conditions of the modern society development, there is a clear need for a complex educational tool which may be used not only in the educational process, but also beyond its “limits” (in everyday life as well as in unpredictable and extraordinary situations) over a meaningful time period and would equip students with the skills they require to tackle the problems of elementary, functional and socio-cultural character that they are faced with. As the literature review shows, school subject Olympiads, which are a systematic/regular extracurricular activity, are one such tool that adequately meets the conditions outlined [9, p. 16]. There has been a clear shift towards humanitarian metrics (common values, responsibility, non-linear thinking of leaders – which, in turn, require a consensus amongst the participants, negotiation skills, i. e. communicative culture and humanitarian culture as a whole). The economic factors that have shaped the current situation point to the need for some common linguocultural basis, a “working” language of interaction, which niche is currently occupied by the English language<sup>1</sup>.

The transitional period in the development of the Russian educational systems, full of reforms (attempts to switch to a 12-year school system, specialised education, standardisation at all levels of the system of continuous education, etc.) and the moves towards decreasing variability in the educational sphere that followed it (e. g. the return of gymnasiums and lyceums to the ranks of state comprehensive schools, especially in Moscow) are marked by a certain half-heartedness – a feature that has historically been characteristic of Russian education, an irreversible trend in learning and especially in education – which naturally became a factor in the emergence of opposing and contradictory processes: constructive / innovative and destructive / anti-innovative [10]. Innovative pro-

cesses in Russian education (which have to a large extent been primarily phenomena of modernisation of educational institutions of the past, such as gymnasiums, lyceums, cadet corps; project activities, etc.) have become a means of shaping teaching and learning in schools into a more active form, actualising the research principle in education, as well as of individualisation and differentiation in education and their most developed form – individual curricula for learners and specialised education. This has led to the enrichment of the didactic and methodological arsenal of forms of organisation of cognitive activity which are employed in in-depth study of individual, often narrowly specialised, subjects, in the development of cognitive interest and the creative activity of schoolchildren, and in fostering self-discovery [11]. An important role in this is played by the concept of competitiveness in university admissions and subsequent employment, as an element of a market economy. These forms also include school subject Olympiads, the regularity of which – from the municipal to the all-Russian and international stages – has only tended to increase, and the content of tasks has constantly increased in difficulty level, which also speaks in favour of intensifying the cognitive activity of students<sup>2</sup>. In general, there is an expansion of the socio-cultural and personal significance of subject Olympiads. Against the backdrop of the growth and expansion of the Olympiad movement, Olympiads in foreign languages (in particular in English, which quickly became the lingua-franca intercultural communication), came to the fore and attracted special pedagogical attention. A special niche is occupied by international competitions in various types of literacy (functional, reading, mathematical, natural-scientific, economic, etc.). Subject Olympiads have entered the sphere of professional education as a characteristic phenomenon.

Multilingualism in the era of globalisation is a characteristic feature of the socio-cultural development of society, equally significant for societal progress and for the personal growth of each individual [12]. Language commonly serves as an indicator of the development of society, culture, science, the practical interaction of people, their ability to come together to solve urgent problems, and performs humanis-

<sup>1</sup> Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ). (2003). *Towards a learning profession: The teacher competencies framework and the continuing professional development of teachers.* – Hong Kong: Government Printer.

<sup>2</sup> Chigisheva O. P. *Functional literacy of the researcher: methodology for introducing a new scientific concept/under scientific.* ed. S. V. Ivanova. – M.: Institute of Education Development Strategy of the Russian Academy of Education, 2021. – 122 p.

tic functions such as the epistemological, axiological, culture-creative, dialogical, moral, etc. functions – thus fostering the unity and cooperation of scientists in interdisciplinary research and the mobility of professional retraining. The state of the educational space is, by and large, the most important condition for the preservation and promotion of humanitarian and humanistic values, including the fundamental concepts of “good” and “evil”, to which students must be educated not to be “criminally indifferent”. The key role belongs to subjects like Russian (or other native language), foreign languages, Literature, History amongst others; textbooks and curricula for these subjects must be written in accordance with the criteria of logic and literacy [13]. However, in this didactic and methodological field, these are hardly ideal in terms of logical and informational criteria – clarity, accuracy, consistency and evidence.

In the educational process as it pertains to school teaching practices, literacy is taught and consolidated mainly in the former two; literacy as a learning process is assumed to be the responsibility of primary education, whilst after primary school this aspect of literacy fades to the background; literacy as a text is considered in cases of written assessment (final exams in written form) and is considered virtually irrelevant by teachers at oral exams in all subjects, especially outside the humanities. In other words, the speech of students whilst delivering oral answers does not concern today’s teachers very much, and this observation is not limited to exam conditions. A special contribution to the spread of illiteracy was made by the specifics of tasks for the Unified State Examination and the growing taste for “ready-made” knowledge on digital media – since in lesson settings, due to the time constraints there is often very little space for either the teacher or the student to engage in well thought-out, well-articulated monologue speech. Analysis of the theory and practice of conducting school subject Olympiads shows that the preparation of students for the Olympiads is based on the link between educational and extracurricular activities; therefore, the most important real task of the Olympiads is

the cultivation of literacy in students, regardless of the “Olympiad” subject or the type of literacy: language literacy in Russian / the native language, and even more so in a foreign language, if it is the category of the “Olympiad” subject, is the first requirement and the main prerequisite enabling quality work of the teacher with the student in achieving Olympiad excellence, and most importantly, in facilitating the personal and the future professional development of the student [14].

The views of school teachers on the goals of school education are rather more specific. Systematic sociological studies of this question paint a detailed picture of the values and objectives associated with the activities of the state comprehensive school towards the end of the 20th century [15]. 25 years (as of 2023), this picture has changed in quantitative and qualitative terms: there has been a decrease in percentage values across all indicators, and new target preferences among school teachers have emerged; with a slight lead, the top rank is occupied by “strong subject knowledge”, but the percentage of teachers who gave this answer, at 56 %, is significantly inferior to the values recorded 25 years ago (68 and 79 %) [10]. Another feature of teachers’ target preferences in 2023 is the emergence of new goals: “successful exam performance” (correlates with the indicator “experience in communicating with people” – 25 %), “admission to a university on government budget” and “Olympiad achievement” (9 % each). In addition, the following opinions were expressed (that, though voiced by a select few, nevertheless reflect the interests of the teaching community in terms of not only its sociocultural diversity, but the firm convictions in the traditional functional purpose of the school that still dominate amongst members): the school should educate, develop, promote socialisation, and provide career assistance. “Free-form” answers given by teachers are grouped by us in accordance with the contents of the traditional objectives of the school as they correlate with the objectives formulated in the Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” (FZ-273 of December 29, 2012).

**Teachers’ views on the objectives of the school / Мнение учителей о целях школы**

| <i>Point / Пункт</i>  | <i>1996 г.</i> | <i>1999 г.</i> | <i>2023 г.</i> |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| capacity to think independently / умение мыслить самостоятельно | 82 %           | 85 %           | 53 %           |
| strong subject knowledge / прочные знания по предметам          | 68 %           | 79 %           | 56 %           |
| broad general knowledge / общекультурный кругозор               | 63 %           | 66 %           | 44 %           |

*End the table / Окончание таблицы*

| <i>Point / Пункт</i>   | <b>1996 г.</b> | <b>1999 г.</b> | <b>2023 г.</b> |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| assistance in developing talents / помощь в развитии способностей                            | 54 %           | 61 %           | 49,6 %         |
| ability to navigate life / способность ориентироваться в жизни                               | 46 %           | 58 %           | 31 %           |
| experience of interpersonal / communication опыт общения с людьми                            | 50 %           | 57 %           | 25 %           |
| ideas of own values and life purpose / представления о ценностях, смысле жизни               | 48 %           | 51 %           | 21 %           |
| code of conduct in society, manners / правила поведения (умение вести себя)                  | 33 %           | 48 %           | 15 %           |
| awareness of different occupations and career options / представления о различных профессиях | 20 %           | 28 %           | 11 %           |
| <i>successful exam performance / успешная сдача экзаменов</i>                                |                |                | 25 %           |
| <i>admission to university on government budget / поступление в вуз на бюджет</i>            |                |                | 9 %            |
| <i>Olympiad achievement / результат в олимпиадах</i>   |                |                | 9 %            |

Our study of this issue through a survey of teachers (with a sample size of 236 school teachers) has demonstrated the following. By the beginning of the 21st century, “capacity to think independently” dominated teachers’ conceptions of the objectives of the school, and the value of this indicator showed an upward tendency (from 82 % in 1996 to 85 % in 1999); an even greater spurt is seen in the indicators “strong subject knowledge” (from 68 % to 79 %) and “assistance in developing talents” (54 % to 61 %), with the former two objectives of the school quite strongly correlated with each other and slightly lower percentage values for the third objective (“assistance in the development of talents”), which is broadly related to the objective of cultivating “broad general knowledge” (63 to 66 %). These data unanimously point to the priority of the educational goals of the school. The group of objectives of a social nature: “the ability to navigate life” (46 to 58 %), “experience of interpersonal communication” (50 to 57 %), “ideas of own values and life purpose” (48 to 51 %) are significantly lower on teachers’ lists of priorities. Even less significant appears to be “code of conduct in society, manners” (33 to 48 %) and four to three times less attention is given to the role of the school as a provider of career guidance (20 to 28 %). Some reflection on teachers’ views and priorities regarding the objectives of the school over a nearly 25-year period of time (2023) indicates that neglect of educational goals and the school’s role in socialisation leads to worrying consequences for the younger generation (underage crime, child and teenage suicide) and for society as a whole. In characterising the conceptions modern teachers have about the objectives of the school (Table), we note similar trends with several alterations on the one hand, and on the oth-

er hand, a significant decrease (almost by 1/3) in the percentage of teachers who place importance on goals favoured by the previous generation, with some dominance of “strong subject knowledge” (56 %).

The achievement of some other goals presented in the table is, according to teachers, much less important, and these indicators are 1.5–2 times lower compared to the 1999 figures. However, it can be seen in the responses of teachers that a new vision of the goals of the school has emerged: “successful exam performance” (25 %), “admission to university on government budget” (9 %), “Olympiad achievement” (9 %) are the three new items on the list. Their emergence was, of course, brought about by new trends in the development of the country’s educational systems, the wide-reaching standardisation of education, new requirements and rules for university admissions in the context of the Bologna process – all of this has, in practice, necessitated a de-facto dismantling of the existing system of general secondary and higher education in the country. A long-running trend in teachers’ conceptions of the goals of the school is the relatively low importance placed on career guidance (20, 28 and 11 % in 1996, 1999 and 2023 respectively).

The decrease in the values of indicators relating to the essential goals of the school seen in recent decades (Figure 1) can be explained by a shift in teachers’ vision towards completely new goals for the school, which can also be grouped into groups that reflect the socio-cultural nature of the school: educational, upbringing, and development, with the significance of career guidance still low (3 responses out of 44). The *educational profile* of the school is described by teachers in the following words: “to teach children to learn; to encourage and mo-

tivate students to participate in Olympiads; to give the child a solid base of knowledge to passing future exams and early career guidance; to accustom children to work (mental and physical); to foster an interest in science and culture, to equip students with the tools they will require on the path of knowledge and a wide range of opportunities to put the material studied in the subject into practice; to expand the scope of the content of school subjects to encompass the development of scientific knowledge, skills, methods of activity, the formation of a scientific type of thinking, education and training in research, data interpretation, transformation and application in various educational settings; development of the Olympic movement; assistance in the development of students' talents; the opportunity to later realise their professional potential in the subject area" and others (38 % of the sample).

The *upbringing dimension* of the objectives of the modern school is reflected in the responses: "to give children an idea of the value of learning and knowledge, the meaning of life, to educate a free and intelligent generation that will be capable of making large-scale positive change, advancing science, and improving the world; the ability to make an informed choice and to be responsible for it later; to learn to set priorities; socialisation; to increase the role of patriotism, familiarity with cultural values, the historical heritage of the country, and general knowledge; psychological help; assistance in finding oneself in life and benefitting oneself and others", et cetera (33 %).

The *development goals* of the school are seen by teachers to be encapsulated by the following: "to develop the aptitudes of students and their independence; to foster curiosity; to cultivate teamworking skills; assistance in the development of talents; student motivation; development of communication skills and creative skills; active life position" (20 % from the sample). There are also responses indicating some teachers see organisational opportunities as belonging to the goals of the school: "creating a comfortable learning environment (well-stocked classrooms, libraries, educational equipment); helping students discover new opportunities; supporting student initiatives outside the school" and others (9 %).

Thus, new axiological priorities in the development of the domestic educational system and a new value compass, which are impossible to follow through evolutionary changes alone and

require a decisive breakdown of the existing system, have led to the decline in the importance of the values and goals of the former educational system where school Olympiads are afforded a certain role. However, we believe that post-humanistic trends in all spheres of society, especially in its most sensitive area, education, have provided an impetus to strengthen the Olympiad movement in the country, which is increasingly acquiring a systematic, organised procedural format as a parallel movement in the development of the domestic educational system, as well as those of other countries.

The above allows us to conclude that the goals of school education should take into account the current socio-cultural situation, creating conditions for students to understand the need to consolidate the efforts of countries, nations, governments, scientists, artists, and educators based on universal values, respect for national traditions, multilingualism, humanistic meanings and humanitarian-axiological semantics. School education plays a direct role in this, and its aim, from primary school through to high school, should be the task of developing the skills of appropriate use of language in a multi-ethnic world, and school subject Olympiads have an important part to play in this.

**Conclusions.** To generalise, the outline of today's sociocultural situation contains the following features: saturation with disordered arrays of information flows, half-heartedness of reforms in education, emphasis on the use of digital technologies, axiological crisis as a "knot of risks" – cognitive, social, technological, environmental, economic (cybercrime, deepfake technologies, illiteracy, etc.).

Rejection of traditional cultural values, pluralism of opinions, freedom of choice devoid of moral imperatives, "rejection of truth, simulacrum" and bureaucratic "newspeak" at all levels, including power structures (seen in, e. g., the uncertainty of wording in official documents) and management, "the desire to solve a classical problem by non-classical methods" (unnecessary originality that takes away from tackling the actual gist of the problem), etc., have become a global risk factor, and education has become entangled in processes that are risky for the school. The positive side of this era is the high cognitive and creative activity of a significant share of the student body in both schools and universities. An analysis of the goals of school education through the prism of official documents and the opinions of

teachers indicates that in the context of various transformational processes, the acceleration of technological breakthroughs in various areas of life and activity, total digitalisation and an axiological crisis, education and, in particular, the school, are not able to qualitatively solve all of

its tasks for each student, but nonetheless has a sufficiently powerful resource in the form of a mass multi-subject and multi-level Olympiad movement enabling each student to study for, and apply their mental strength and abilities in, the Olympiad marathon.

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