

Chapter 7

Network–Based Continuous Education Opportunities: Case of X Medical University in Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and present theoretical and empirical findings about the ways that teachers in Higher Education (HE) interpret the role of ICT for their professional development both as teachers in HE and as medical professionals in some cases. Two research questions were formulated: 1) Why is the employment of technologies fully accepted and promoted in almost all aspects of professional activity, but employment of ICT for teaching and learning at HE is not always used to its full potential? 2) What (if any) educational support is needed for university teachers to use available e-learning opportunities for their own development as teachers to a greater extent? Educational support for university teachers to use contemporary information communication technologies and network provisions more effectively for their competence development are presented.

INTRODUCTION

In the world, that is aiming to become a knowledge society, up-to-date information is the most valued commodity, knowledge, and skills. Different scientists analyze various aspects of the application of information and communication technologies (further on referred as ICT) in the study process, and, also, they emphasize ICT value and im-

portance (Peceliunaite, 2011; Rutkauskiene & Gudoniene, 2010; Davidson & Waddington, 2010; Rupesh, 2009; Chye, Tan, & Goh, 2004; Kemmis, Atkin, & Wright, 1977). Different authors make similar conclusions as concerns ICT being capable of forming up-to-date cultural and technological environment, where learning turns to be different; respectively, the behaviour norms of university educators and students change as well. In this

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chapter we will address two research questions by starting with a short historical introspection and then discussing two main theses.

Firstly, we must be aware that human history itself is a history of globalization. Though the term “globalisation” has dominated in scientific, political, and economical discourse during these last decades, however, the phenomenon itself has been an integral reality of our history since our written memory. Even if we focus on quite recent times, the last millennium, the incidents of globalization are evident in some cases, especially, if education is analysed: moreover, if higher education is analysed. For example, the first universities, such as Paris University (13th century), Torun University (15th century), are the examples of extreme multiculturalism with people from all the countries and kingdoms of the time discussing professional issues and promoting their profession (Durkheim, 1977).

The reason why the discourse on globalization has become so dominant in contemporary world is twofold. Firstly, people today live longer than they had lived ever before. Advancements in science and technology enable citizens in at least one third of countries in the world to live a relatively healthy and rewarding life until the mid of their 80-ies. Secondly, these technologies are based on ICT to an impressive degree in agriculture, industry, transport, medicine: practically, in every sector. However, ICT are used not only for the purpose that their title suggests, i.e. as a tool for information exchange and communication.

Due to these factors, based on advancements in science and technology, we can state about contemporary people the following:

- They live longer than ever before;
- They are exposed to the world and things happening all over the world, also, participating in some of those events more intensively than ever before in human history.

Therefore, even if, objectively, globalization has always been a reality of the humankind, only in recent years people have both time and means to experience globalization and to participate in it intensively. Also, if earlier exposure to globalization was a privilege just for a few (for those affiliated with Medieval universities) or a disaster for quite many (for those who built grand churches, palaces and died under crumbling pillars), today exposure and participation is a reality of almost every person in almost every country.

We are making this historical introspection, because one of the main theses in this chapter is that in case of professional development of university teachers at HE, ICT also has a twofold impact on the profession and professionals. This impact is controversial at certain times. On the one hand, medical profession today is a highly technologized activity. On the other hand, however, as some studies suggest, medical professionals do not always employ technologies (especially ICT) to their full potential for the purpose of professional development (Butrime, 2011). This discrepancy or paradox, which is not universal or systemic for sure, however, raises some questions, at least in the Lithuanian context, about the way university teachers at HE, particularly, at medical university interpret the role of technologies in their direct activities and in their professional development.

That is, we formulate a *research question 1* (RQ1) as follows: why the employment of technologies - is fully accepted and promoted in almost all aspects of professional activity, however, employment of ICT for teaching and learning is seldom used to its full potential. *Research question 2* (RQ2) aims at identifying what (if any) educational support is needed for university teachers/ medical professionals to use available computer network-based opportunities for their development to a greater extent.

The *purpose* of this chapter is to analyze and present theoretical and empirical findings about

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