

Training of personnel for non-profit organizations in the context of the implementation of the Service Learning approach in higher education institutions: problem updating

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Abstract: The growing importance of non-profit organizations (NPOs) for the development of a people support system and civic engagement has determined the need to train personnel capable of participating professionally in solving socially significant problems. The work covers updating the professional training of personnel for NPOs in general and socially oriented NPOs in particular in the higher education system based on the Service Learning approach. The introduction of the Service Learning approach into the process of professional training of personnel for NPOs allows integrating training formats, which ensures the development of social responsibility, project thinking and motivation for participation in NPOs in students. The empirical part of the study was carried out during the implementation of the “Service Learning” federal program at the Southern Federal University. Students who were involved in solving social problems from NPOs during the 2024/25 academic year participated in the study. The obtained data allowed confirming (students’ interest in the professionalization of social activities, a steadily formed request for competencies that ensure effective professional activities in NPOs, predominant forms of students’ active participation and involvement in the work of NPOs through practice-oriented training built on the basis of the Service Learning approach) the presence of students’ interest in this sector of the economy and the possibility of building their professional career in NPOs. Based on the identified interest of students in social activities and the request for competencies relevant to the activities of NPOs, the analysis of the obtained results allowed updating the need to implement professional training of personnel for NPOs in the higher education system on the basis of the Service Learning approach.

Keywords: professional training; personnel for non-profit organizations; Service Learning approach; higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasing attention of the state to the development of civil society institutions, there is a significant increase in the importance of the non-profit sector as a sphere of social responsibility, innovation and partnership practices. According to sociological research, in the last ten years there has been a noticeable increase in civic participation: the level of involvement of Russians in volunteer activities has grown from 3 to 28 % and participation in projects of non-profit organizations (NPOs) – by 9 %¹. These indicators reflect

a stable trend towards increasing public involvement and indicate a redistribution of social functions between the state, society and the third sector. As noted by the Chairman of the Committee on Youth Policy of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation A.P. Metelev in an interview opening a series of analytical publications by the Social Information Agency in partnership with the Dobro.rf (Добро.рф) platform, such changes are caused both by the expansion of the infrastructure for supporting NPOs and by an increase in the civic maturity of the population, its desire

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¹*Volunteers of Russia: monitoring. Analytical review. VTsIOM novosti.* URL: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/volontery-rossii-monitoring>.

for personal responsibility for what is happening in society². The growth of civic activity is caused both by macrosocial changes, including the evolution of political culture and the consolidation of support for public initiatives at the constitutional level, and by the extraordinary events of recent years. In the context of the crisis, new forms of solidarity, mutual assistance and responsibility are being formed, initiated both from below and with the support of government institutions and business. In these conditions, NPOs act both as an instrument of social support and as a space for the formation of civic maturity, the unification of efforts and the implementation of specific changes in the quality of people's lives.

Such dynamic development of the non-profit sector requires systematic training of personnel who have not only knowledge of the functioning of NPOs, but also experience in social design, the ability to identify and solve specific social problems in partnership with various actors. This is confirmed by the measures taken at the state level in the context of targeted work to institutionalize the training of specialists for the non-profit sector. Thus, on the instructions of D.N. Chernyshenko, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labor together with the Dobro.rf Association are developing professional standards and new educational areas of training in universities, in particular in the specialty "Specialist in the management of socially oriented projects". In parallel, a system of internships and employment of students in NPOs at the stage of their studies at the university is being developed, as well as the concept of the social mission of universities, which implies the transformation of their role towards active participation in the development of territories and civic education of youth.

It can be said that the modern system of higher education is faced with the need to adapt the programs for training specialists to the current demands of society and changes in the social structure. Moreover, not all areas of training include components related to the formation of competencies for work in the non-profit sector in their educational trajectory. At the same time, it is the higher school that has significant potential for the formation of students' experience of civic responsibility, social project planning skills and readiness to carry out professional activities in the field of NPOs.

One of the promising areas that can ensure such integration is the Service Learning approach, which includes the study of academic disciplines with the formation of skills for socially useful work. In the international scientific tradition, this approach is substantiated through the concepts of civic education [1], participation and inclusion [2], and social capital [3]. A number of studies emphasize the role of an approach aimed at forming the civic identity and professional self-determination of students [4–6]. According to this approach, the key element of the educational process is reflection, which provides students with an un-

derstanding of their socially significant experience as an element of formation and development [7].

In the Russian system of higher education, the process of professional training is actively implemented built on the basis of the Service Learning approach, where the name of the approach is an adapted translation of the concept of "service learning" [8]. The issues of using this approach in the process of comprehensive development of the student's personality have been noted by a number of Russian scientists [9]. V.V. Nikolsky, having reconstructed the subject field of research covering the implementation of the Service Learning approach in higher education, notes that this pedagogical approach is actively used in Russian universities, but scientific research into the effectiveness of its implementation is still at an early stage [10]. Exploring the potential of Service Learning as an effective pedagogical means of forming a civic-patriotic culture of students in the university environment, scientists highlight its special role in the development of student youth through active involvement in socially significant activities at the local and regional levels [11]. Considering Service Learning as an effective tool for forming the professional identity of future teachers, the authors believe that special attention should be paid to its role in developing a reflexive attitude to the social mission of the profession and strengthening the value orientations of students [12; 13]. Involvement of student youth in projects valuable to society contributes to the development of a sense of responsibility, an active life position, and a willingness to participate in socially significant changes. Consequently, through participation in socially oriented project-based learning, students develop a civic position [14]. Based on the results of the analysis of foreign experience in integrating the "service learning" model into the educational systems of various countries, promising areas for the introduction of Service Learning into the educational practice of higher education as a pedagogical approach to the professional training of personnel of the 21st century for the domestic economy have been identified: organizing students' project activities in partnership with NPOs, conducting educational visits, working together to solve socially significant problems, involving students in activities on campus, and other forms of cooperation aimed at developing students' civic responsibility³.

According to the interpretation presented by scientists from the Southern Federal University, the "service" component of the pedagogical approach under consideration is treated as an activity aimed at helping another person and performing socially useful tasks, while "learning" is implemented through the inclusion of students in real social projects based on partnership with representatives of non-profit organizations. The success of the implementation of

² Artyom Metelev: "It is not enough to simply involve 20 million young people in social activities – it is important to retain them". *Odobreno*. URL: <https://artem-metelev.ru/post/tps1znd1a1-artem-metelev-malo-prosto-vovlech-v-obsch>.

³ Zemtsov D.I., Metelev A.P., Yashina A.V., Kirienko L.S., Gruzdev I.A., Dmitrieva A.S., Startsev S.V. *Obuchenie sluzheniem: klyuchevye rezultaty issledovaniya zarubezhnogo opyta: doklady k XXIV Yasin'skoy (Aprelskoy) mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferentsii po problemam razvitiya ekonomiki i obshchestva*, Moskva, 2023 g. [Service Learning: Key Results of the Study of Foreign Experience. Report for Yasin (April) International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development] Moscow, Vysshaya shkola ekonomiki Publ., 2023. 24 p. EDN: QIQOVB.

the Service Learning approach largely depends on sustainable intersectoral connections, the project infrastructure of the university and the level of students' readiness to solve socially significant problems in conditions of uncertainty and teamwork [15]. Service Learning in domestic educational practice can become a methodological basis for modern professional education, which will both allow for the formation of students' social and project competence in real conditions and contribute to an increase in personal motivation, awareness of the social significance of their professional activities, and the search for ways of successful professional self-realization. The effective implementation of the Service Learning approach in the process of personnel training is possible within the framework of specialized educational programs in both the social and humanitarian profile and technical, economic and other areas, where "service" becomes a resource for the formation of professional competencies, civic responsibility and skills for implementing interdisciplinary interaction [16; 17].

Analysis of research in the field of implementing the Service Learning approach in the system of vocational education in Russia and abroad allows saying that with all the variety of works covering the study of this approach, the issues of studying its capabilities in the context of training specialists for non-profit organizations remain poorly studied, which necessitated the study of its capabilities for training personnel for NPOs in the educational practice of universities.

The purpose of this study is to actualize the need of training specialists in universities for the non-profit sector system, in particular for socially oriented non-profit organizations, by means of the Service Learning approach.

METHODS

The study was conducted as part of the implementation of the "Service Learning" federal program (hereinafter referred to as the Program) at the Southern Federal University. The empirical study was conducted in the 2024/25 academic year. The participants of the Program were 111 students of different fields and levels of training. Among the respondents, students aged 18–20 prevailed – 58.6 %; the group over 24 years old made up 32.4 %; students aged 21–23 made up 7.2 %, and the proportion of persons under 18 years old was 1.8 %. The sample was dominated by women (81.1 %) with a minority of men (18.9 %). The distribution of participants by year was as follows: 1st year – 43.2 %, 2nd year – 15.3 %, 3rd year – 9 %, 4th year – 4.5 %, 1st year master's degree – 15.3 %, 2nd year master's degree – 12.6 %. Thus, students of all levels of higher education, including bachelor's and master's degrees, without restrictions on the areas of training, participated in the study.

The data collection method was a questionnaire aimed at studying the level of students' awareness of the activities of NPOs, motivation to participate in socially oriented projects. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions that allowed obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data. The structure of the questionnaire was built on the block principle and included five main sections:

1) socio-demographic block – questions aimed at collecting a general social portrait of the participants: gender, age, field and level of training, year, availability of volunteer or other social experience;

2) awareness of the activities of non-profit organizations – questions aimed at identifying the level of students' awareness of the mission, functions and specifics of the work of organizations in the non-profit sector of the economy, as well as knowledge of sources of information about them;

3) assessment of participation in the Program – subjective assessments of the benefits and significance of participation in the Program, its impact on personal and professional development;

4) professional interests and intentions – this block recorded professional preferences, readiness for further participation in socially oriented projects, motivation for inclusion in professional activities in the non-profit sector;

5) motivational and demotivational factors – the section covers the analysis of internal and external incentives for students to participate in social project activities, as well as barriers limiting their involvement in such work formats.

The questionnaire was posted online on the Yandex.Forms platform. The processing of the received data was carried out through the percentage presentation of the results. For each answer option, the percentage ratio was calculated using the formula: (number of answers / total number of respondents) × 100 %. The percentage distribution of answers allowed conducting a quantitative analysis of the data, clearly presenting the results of the study, identifying problems, and determining the main trends.

RESULTS

The results of the conducted study allowed compiling a generalized socio-demographic portrait of students, research participants implementing social project activities within the framework of the Program, and identifying key areas of their interests, motivational attitudes and educational needs related to participation in NPO projects.

An analysis of the experience of solving social problems within the framework of the Program showed a wide variability of forms of participation in socially significant activities. The most common tasks were organizing cultural and educational events – 27.1 %; helping disabled people – 22.4 %; supporting older people – 10 %; participating in environmental initiatives – 8.8 %; working on organizing public spaces – 7.1 %; developing IT solutions and legal assistance – 4.7 % each. At the same time, 70.3 % of students noted that the task they were solving was formulated directly by the NPO, and 29.7 % worked on initiatives coming from other sources (including educational structures).

It should be noted that the understanding and perception of social issues by students changed under the influence of practice-oriented participation in solving social problems. 48.6 % of students reported that the activity on solving social problems in the logics of project implementation helped them to better understand the existing social problems; 35.2 % noted the expansion of their general horizons; 7.2 % did not record changes in perception; 9 % found it difficult to answer. At the same time, interest in the activities of non-

profit organizations was distributed among a number of priority areas. The most attractive were: cultural and educational projects – 26.4 %; support for socially vulnerable groups – 18.3 %; development of communities and territories – 15.9 %; charity and fundraising – 14.2 %; environmental initiatives – 12.6 %; human rights activities – 10.6 %. It is significant that only 2 % of respondents found it difficult to choose, which indicates a formed focus on social issues. As for the preferred forms of interaction with NPOs, respondents identified the following acceptable formats of participation: volunteer activities – 23.1 %; internships and practice – 22.6 %; participation in campaigns and events – 19.6 %; partnership and project co-authorship – 16.2 %; official employment – 15.5 %. Only 3 % of students exclude the possibility of further participation in the activities of NPOs.

During the study, the authors also analyzed the influence of participation in solving social problems from NPOs on the development of competencies. 46.8 % of respondents believe that participation contributed to their development to a significant extent; 45.1 % – to some extent; 6.3 % are not sure about the effect; 1.8 % did not note a positive impact. As for the need for knowledge and skills, the following turned out to be the most significant for students: communication skills – 20.9 %; project management skills – 17.4 %; legal literacy – 11.3 %; PR and promotion of social initiatives – 10.6 %; social impact assessment – 10.6 %; volunteer management and work with grants – 10.3 % each. The least in demand were fundraising (6.1 %) and other forms (2.5 % found it difficult to answer).

When studying the motivational attitudes and prospects for student participation in NPO activities, it can be noted that when asked about their readiness to continue cooperation with NPOs, 62.2 % answered yes if there was an interesting project; 27.9 % were definitely ready; 9 % were undecided; 0.9 % were not interested. Among the factors that influence the decision to get involved in NPO projects with the possibility of further employment, the following were highlighted: the opportunity to apply knowledge in practice – 24.1 %; career prospects – 21 %; a clear understanding of the public benefit – 16.6 %; flexible work schedule – 16.2 %; financial reward – 11.4 %; support – 9.3 %.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data obtained during the study allowed identifying a number of empirically confirmed reasons indicating the need and demand for training specialists for socially oriented NPOs in modern domestic universities using the potential and resources of the Service Learning approach. These reasons, firstly, include the fact that students from different areas of training are interested in the professionalization of social activities. This is related to the fact that most students consider their participation in the process of implementing NPO projects not as a single episode, but as a potential professional trajectory (62.2 % are ready to continue cooperation with NPOs if there is a meaningful project, 27.9 % stated their desire to work in the non-profit sphere). Secondly, the study revealed a consistently formed demand among students for competencies relevant to the profile of activities of non-profit organizations (high motivation to de-

velop professional communication and teamwork skills – 20.9 %, social project management – 17.4 %, legal literacy and knowledge of the basics of NPO functioning – 11.3 %, SMM and PR, social impact assessment, volunteer management – 10–10.6 % each). Thirdly, the predominant forms of active participation and involvement in the work of NPOs among students (forms of student participation: volunteer activities – 23 %, internships and practical training – 22.6 %, participation in projects as partners – 16.2 %, official employment – 15.5 %) and motivating factors (the opportunity to apply professional knowledge – 24.1 %, career growth prospects – 21 %, a clear understanding of the social impact of the project – 16.6 %, flexible schedule and support from curators – a total of 25.5 %) were identified.

The problem of forming the staffing of NPOs lies in the absence of a mechanism for attracting "specialists of any level to work in NPOs" [18, p. 52]. According to research by scientists, the main segment of NPO employees can be students and young specialists. The results of our study confirmed as well this conclusion, since about 90 % of the surveyed students are ready to continue their interaction with NPOs, up to the formalization of labor relations. This category of students can really become the resource that will allow the non-profit sector to develop intensively, since in organizations of this type one can clearly see the opportunities for gaining social and professional experience in solving real problems, demonstrate social activity and bring real benefits in the field of their profession. Until recently, the main forms of attracting personnel for NPOs were work experience internship of students, temporary employment during vacation time, involvement in the organization of mass events, and conducting scientific research. These channels allow students to get involved in the activities of NPOs, but this inclusion is fragmentary and, for example, at the end of the internship, the student leaves the organization, sometimes without waiting for the end of the project. According to our study, this is caused by the fact that the student's entry into the NPO activity space during the organization of the internship is carried out at various points of its functioning, and inclusion as a volunteer is carried out mainly through word of mouth (30 % of employees) [18, p. 53]. Our study confirmed that the Service Learning approach allows students to become effectively involved in the NPO activities due to mass involvement in continuous project activities in the university – NPO interaction space and the implementation of a full cycle of solving a social problem, which makes it a permanent channel of entry into the non-profit sector with subsequent employment (70 % of students are ready to become involved in the work of NPOs).

The readiness of NPO employees to solve the assigned tasks is of great importance for long-term success. According to the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), almost 50 % of NPO leaders point to personnel issues (from recruitment to retention) as the main challenge facing their organizations⁴. At the same time, according to the Independent Sector

⁴ Buchanan P., Broder L., Christina I. *State of Nonprofits 2023. What Funders Need to Know?* Cambridge: The Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2023. 24 p. URL: https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NVP_State-of-Nonprofits_2023.pdf.

report, 48.5 % of NPOs have increased the workload of their employees to meet the growing demand for their services⁵. It should be noted that in Russia, in recent years, the non-profit sector has also demonstrated growth and development: according to a study by the ZIRCON group⁶, as of November 2024, 220,000 NPOs were registered (140,000 of them are socially oriented), in which the need to increase the number of full-time employees is increasing.

As the need for qualified personnel arises and grows, it is important for NPOs to equip their teams with relevant competencies, tools, and resources necessary to optimize their functionality and avoid burnout. Currently, the most popular way to achieve this is in-house training of personnel. This training requires certain resources and time, which an organization cannot always afford while simultaneously implementing certain projects. Since NPO employees perform different functions depending on the projects being implemented, they may need to undergo training. However, even at the stage of getting professional education at the university, student youth can acquire the necessary competencies to carry out activities in an NPO, and already when implementing projects, undergo specific in-house training within the framework of a specific project.

The lack of key competencies of NPO employees can become a limiting factor for them. Due to partnerships with leading universities in the country, non-profit organizations can either hire qualified specialists or provide their employees with the necessary skills and knowledge through training in university programs. This will allow organizations to optimize their activities, improve the quality of results and attract talented young specialists. Highly professional personnel working in organizations of the third sector of the economy, especially in socially oriented NPOs, have the potential to strengthen the influence of this sector on solving social problems and the quality of life of people in Russia.

CONCLUSIONS

Being the basis for training future specialists in the context of higher educational institutions in Russia, the Service Learning approach allows both conducting practice-oriented training of personnel for non-profit organizations and motivating them to choose third sector organizations as their place of employment.

⁵ Health of the U.S. Nonprofit Sector. Annual review. Washington, Independent Sector Publ., 2023. 21 p. URL: <https://independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Health-of-the-U.S.-Nonprofit-Sector-Annual-Review.pdf>.

⁶ Vliyaniye i vklad NKO v reshenie sotsialnykh problem i povysheniye kachestva zhizni v Rossii: analiticheskiy doklad na osnove issledovaniya [The influence and contribution of NPO to solving social problems and improving the quality of life in Russia: an analytical report based on research]. Moscow, TsIRKON Publ., 2024. 74 p. URL: https://asi.org.ru/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/analiticheskij_doklad_asi_cirkon_vliyaniye_i_vklad_nko.pdf.

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Подготовка кадров для некоммерческих организаций в контексте реализации подхода «Обучение служением» в высших учебных заведениях: актуализация проблемы

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Аннотация: Рост значимости деятельности некоммерческих организаций (НКО) для развития системы поддержки людей и проявления гражданской активности определил потребность в подготовке кадров, способных осуществлять профессиональное участие в решении общественно значимых задач. Работа посвящена актуализации профессиональной подготовки кадров для НКО вообще и социально ориентированных НКО в частности в системе высшего образования на основе подхода «Обучение служением». Внедрение подхода «Обучение служением» в процесс профессиональной подготовки кадров для НКО позволяет интегрировать форматы обучения, что обеспечивает развитие у студентов социальной ответственности, проектного мышления и мотивации к участию в деятельности НКО. Эмпирическая часть исследования проходила при реализации федеральной программы «Обучение служением» на базе Южного федерального университета. В исследовании приняли участие студенты, которые в течение 2024/25 учебного года были включены в решение социальных задач от НКО. Полученные данные позволили подтвердить (обнаружена заинтересованность студентов в профессионализации социальной деятельности, устойчиво сформированный запрос на компетенции, обеспечивающие эффективную профессиональную деятельность в НКО, преобладающие у студентов формы активного участия и включенности в работу НКО через практико-ориентированную подготовку, выстроенную с опорой на подход «Обучение служением») наличие интереса студентов к данному сектору экономики и возможности выстраивать свою профессиональную карьеру в НКО. Анализ полученных результатов позволил на основании выявленного интереса студентов к социальной деятельности и запроса на компетенции, релевантные деятельности НКО, актуализировать необходимость осуществления в системе высшего образования профессиональной подготовки кадров для НКО на основе подхода «Обучение служением».

Ключевые слова: профессиональная подготовка; кадры для некоммерческих организаций; подход «Обучение служением»; высшее образование.

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