Informational technologies in resolving the social issues of school communities in Uzbekistan

Rustam Shadiev

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Shadiev Rustam

"Capacity Building for Internet Technologies Development and Promotion in Uzbekistan" Project, United Nations Development Programme

Key words: *Informational technology, social issue, school community, Educational Computer Center, online educational project*

Abstract:

This article examines the experience of 40 schools of Uzbekistan in usage of Informational technologies in resolving the social issues of their communities. The article describe the projects that were used by schools in the framework of the "Global Connections and Exchange - Uzbekistan" programme during the 2005-2007 academic years, and results of the projects and their positive experience.

1 Introduction

In the state of transition of Republic of Uzbekistan to market relations the important role plays the direction "The further broadening of the scales and strengthening of the social protection of population, increasing addressness, differentiation and effectiveness of rendering assistance to needy category of population and families…" which is determined as one of priority directions of State program "The year of social protection" accepted by Degree #573 of President of Republic of Uzbekistan from May 23, 2007. Aiming to solve the issue successfully the complex purposeful steps are carried out that is directed to be accomplished in Republic of Uzbekistan. These steps are directed to strengthening the material and technical base of orphanages, specialized boarding schools and old people's home, supporting the children without bread-winners, disabled people and lonely old people, low income families and families with many children and stimulation and payment of work of personnel of the system of social service as well as providing real implementation into life of the noble slogan "You aren't alone", and the year of 2007 that were announced in Uzbekistan as "A year of social protection" [1].

This paper is the review of issues connected with integration of informational technologies (IT) and successful realization of the tasks on social protection of the vulnerable level of population of Uzbekistan. As a basis of solving the given issues, our experience will be taken on working with most distant school communities that are situated in rural areas, where main part of population of our country resides [2]. Given experience were assessed positively by international experts on "Interactive Computer Aided Learning" conferences at Carinthia Tech Institute (Austria) in 2006 and on "Policy options and models for bridging digital divides: Freedom, Sharing and Sustainability in the Global Network Society" seminar at Tampere University in 2005.

2 Educational projects in solving of social issues of school communities

In the framework of "Capacity Building for Internet Technologies Development and Promotion in Uzbekistan" Project of the Government of Uzbekistan supported by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the basis of schools of six distant regions of our country 40 Educational Computer Centres (ECC) were organized. Each of ECCs are provided with modern computer equipment and are connected to internet and teacher of computer science coordinates the work of each centres. There are educational courses that are provided by computer science teachers of the school on working with email, Internet, office applications, web sites and web logs creation for school communities including school administration, teachers, students, their parents and people of neighbouring regions at ECC [3]. Successful participation at those courses allowed to representatives of school communities to integrate IT to educational process effectively on the basis of realization of educational projects, the main part of which directed to solving of educational, economic and social issues of school communities. During the last two years, several tens of educational projects were realized in school communities and examples of three of them, which connected to solving of social issues of school communities, are given below.

2.1 Believe in yourself

On August 1, 2006 the project "Believe in yourself" was launched under initiative of Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, Informational -analytical magazine "InfoComUZ" and UNDP project "Capacity building for Internet technologies development and promotion in Uzbekistan". The purpose of the given project is to render assistance to disabled women in finding equality in our society, by involving them in computer and the Internet trainings in ECC for further achievements of women's needs for professional, communicative, educational and self-improvement purposes [4]. Within the project framework "Believe in Yourself" 8-11th grades schoolgirls selected disabled women on basis of sociological research in their school communities. As advisers and trainers, these schoolgirls make computer literacy training for disabled women. All trainings are conducted in school ECCs located near to residence of training participants, and training timing is defined individually depending on participants' opportunities. The detailed information about "Believe in yourself" project" is placed on online a forum [5] and on the project web log (<http://www.connect.uz/children_forum/index.php? showtopic=809) (http: // connect.uz/blog/blog.php? id=1784) [6]. Besides project girls discuss issues they have encountered with during the teaching process and share their experience and success stories.

"Today I have started the first training with Gulmira" - Pankratov Marina a ninth grade student of Namangan School No.34 shares impressions on her forum. "In spite of the fact that she has physical handicap, she is very optimistically and enthusiastically looks at life. She is attagirl !!! She aspires forward and does not despond. On our first training "My computer", she constantly asked questions and got interested in computing. After studying a new material, I'd gave her a new task and she coped with it successfully".

As a result of the given project, four women from Namangan and Surkhandarya regions have successfully passed computer literacy trainings. Now they can independently turn on and switch off their computers, work with documents and spreadsheets, make resumes competently, work with graphical editor, e-mail and they also learned how to search

necessary information in the Internet. With the purpose further employments of these women, UNDP Project presented personal computer to each training participants as a gift.

2.2 The World Volunteer and Earth Day

The World Volunteer and Earth Day is one of the biggest events of the year, when millions of young people from various part of the world incur a leading role in numerous volunteering activities and projects directed on struggling against environmental contamination. More than 600 representatives of Uzbek School Communities took part in this event. They organized numerous actions on rendering volunteering assistance for those who need care, support and helped community inhabitants, made an improvement and gardening of community territories [7]. For example, senior grade students of Ferghana School No.2 visited Ferghana Children's home where they conducted trainings on computer literacy, showed how to work with text and graphic documents and how to create web pages. As a result there was created a web site of the Ferghana Children's Home [8] (http://domrebenka-fg.ru/) this will help to attract additional sponsors and charitable organizations. Under the direction of Hushvakt Begashev – history teacher and Katayeva Guljamol - computer science teacher, 50 senior grade students of Termez School No.11 organized school territory arrangement. Within the given project framework participants cleared school territory from dust, planted trees and flowers and painted school fence. Students made some meetings as well where students' parents and representatives of school community were invited. In the meeting there were discussed the event importance, plans and process the project goals achievement and targeted goals. As a result, Olim Bobomurodov - one of the student's father had presented 60 trees to the project organizers who planted them in school's territory. Besides representatives of school community presented the project organizers more than 300 flowers and paint for school fence painting.

2.3 Education for all

The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtiene (Thailand) in 1990 during the World Conference on Education for All. It determined a new direction in education, having proclaimed that "Every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs". Annually there are organized various activities to achieve this objective all over the world, including Uzbekistan [9].
On the last week of April 2006 and 2007, school community representatives of Uzbekistan carried out a number of important events. Students, under the direction of school form-master organized a series of seminars for teachers, students and for their parents, and inhabitants of neighborhood as well where they inform participants about movement "Education for all", IT opportunities in educational process, educational projects in which the school had been taking an active part and also about results achieved by school representatives. Besides student visited homes of children, nursing, kindergartens where they made training on IT basics for attendees and carried out theatrical performances based on scripts received from the Internet. "My students made IT basics training for handicapped children from low income families " – said Svetlana Karimova a physical training teacher of Andijan School No.1. "This experience was very useful to my students; they have learned to be patient, compassionate and understanding. After this training, one of my students promised himself to become a teacher"- she added.

There was organized a drawing contest "How one can achieve his main objective "Education for All" in my community (in my city, my neighborhood, in a court yard, houses). More than 100 students aged from 7 till 17 years old took part in the contest. Participants made drawing on a paper using paints, pencils or felt-tip pens and also on a computer with use of graphic editors.

"All children need education and acquire knowledge … " - commented Bekjanova Akjibek the contest winner, fourth-grade student of Nukus School No.4. "Being at school every day is an opportunity to study new and interesting things".

There were initiated a number of online forums during "Education for All" week [10] where each participant could leave messages about how it's possible to reach his/her basic objective "Education for All" and share what kind of results had been achieved so far in his/her class, at school or in neighborhood. One of the most active forums were marked on the following subjects: "How to reach one's basic objective - Education for All in the community?", "What is Education for All?", "Should each student have a teacher?". There were invited experts from Chair of human rights, democracy, peace, international UNESCO agreement, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, representatives of special educational chairs of the Avloniy Central Institute of Professional Development for Public Education Officials, Republican resource center of special education, Republican social gymnasium and others to make forums more interesting and provide forum participants with qualified answers.

3   Educational projects in teaching process

In spite of the fact that educational projects implementation is a massive and labour-intensive process, participation in such projects brings positive result while taking care, paying attention and supporting vulnerable layers of population, in school community activities as well as in educational schools process.

It is necessary to note, that all implementing projects in ECC are adapted for the curriculum and made in accordance with Uzbek state standard. For example, the project "The Global Youth Service Day and Earth Day" is realized at lessons of labour and ecology, the project "Believe in Yourself" was conducted at computer science lessons as lessons' component or out-of-class activity. Working on each projects students acquired many useful knowledge, skills which would be undoubtedly useful to them in their future. Children study project management, project planning and implementation and task delegation. Students analyzing information received from libraries, the Internet and other sources, having comprehended, they put into it practice as e-mail messages, information on a forum and on a web log of the project or as a web pages. They study to make an interview, to organize a meeting with community members or school representatives. During the project teamwork in groups, advanced students involved disinterested and lagging behind students in working process. This helped students to develop discuss and communication skills. Taking certain decisions develops their independence, responsibility and creative approach to solve arising problems. Besides the teachers who had been coordinating students' activity in projects raised the level of their skills and improved knowledge. By introducing educational projects in teaching process, they make lessons much more interesting for students as what pupils have a motivation to study. Creating a final product as a web site, students develop creative skills and learn use computer equipment and programs. Students have additional interests in projects participation and they can spend their spare time with the greater benefit.

Kolotushkina Svetlana, English teacher of Ferghana School No.40 had been using a method of projects in her professional activity since 2003. Together with eighth, ninth and tenth grades students she accomplished more than 10 educational projects. Researches conducted by Svetlana (the data are shown below in diagrams) from September 2006 till July 2007 have indicated that educational projects had positive effect on educational quality improvement, generating students' interest towards lessons, teachers professional development [11].

4   Achievements of school communities

UNDP Project performance quality was not on high level due to lack of experience in school communities to utilize ECC resources. Schools' teachers continued to work on educational projects realization by studying in ECC, using of IT and learning additional literature and materials of teachers of the World. As time goes by, schools have received sufficient experience which now allows them to participate in both international, local contests and projects and receive honourable awards. Looking at the Table No.1 below one can note that three Schools of Uzbekistan were awarded with honourable prizes for participation in the International contest "Cyber Fare" each year, in 2006 and 2007. In 2006 schools received only honourable recognitions but in 2007 they were awarded with platinum, gold and silver awards.

One can note that changes for the best not only in participation quality of projects and competitions, but also in quantity. The Table No. 2 below contains statistical data of participants and nominations of Women Internet Festival of Uzbekistan initiated by Women Committee of Uzbekistan, UNDP, the Tashkent University of Information Technologies (TUIT), magazine "InfoComUz" etc. In the given festival dedicated to increase of women's IT awareness level, there were participated 140 participants in 2006 and this number was doubled reaching 350 in 2007.

In the table No 2., one can see changes in nominations that indicate participants' and organizers' attention increase towards the given competition. In 2006 for nomination No.1 there were submitted only drawings but for the competition in 2007 it was possible to send apart from a drawing, a poster, photo collage, poem and even song dedicated to role of IT in women's life and this year for nomination No. 2 except from web links, it is possible to send links to web logs developed by women of Uzbekistan. In 2006 "Miss Internet" contest winner was defined for fast searching of required information in the Internet and in 2007 a winner was nominated according to participation's results in all five nominations and general results of "Women Internet Festival -2007".

It is notable that before representatives of school communities were informed about projects and competitions via announcements on UNDP Project's web site, at school, neighbourhood, projects meetings but now representatives of school communities have sufficient knowledge and skills independently to find information on projects and competitions, to participate in them and to achieve positive results. For example, in April 2007 Uzbek teacher of Ferghana School No.21 Svetlana Guljaeva found information on "Women in the society" quiz and took part with her essay "Involvement of the women in society". The quiz were organized by Theodor Heuss Kolleg, Institute for International Cooperation of German People's Universities Association, National Association of Nongovernmental Organizations and UNDP in Uzbekistan with purpose to raise involvement and interest of women to social activities [12]. As a result, Svetlana placed first in "Best essay" nomination and she got ROISON DVD and TV as well as certificate from organizational committee. In July 2007,

Nurmatov Sohibjon 8th grade student from school #43 Bulakboshi Andijan region and Halilov Bekzod 9th grade student from Margilan academic lyceum in Fergana region found information about "European Union" quiz that were hold by the Embassy of Germany and others EU embassies among students of schools, colleges and lyceums of Uzbekistan in order to involve them to learn more about EU [13]. As a result Sohibjon placed first place and received computer and Bekzod placed third one and received encouraging prize from organizational committee.

I would like to note that among other achievements the victory of web sites of gymnasium #1 Nukus that placed first place and received computer and of school #1 Termez that placed second place and received digital photo camera on the web site development contest for Uzbek schools, lyceums and colleges that was organized by UZINFOCOM centre [14].

Special attention is needed to the victory of Tech Age Girls Project within the framework of UNDP Projects and in cooperation with Women's Committee of Uzbekistan, United Nations Informational Centre and TUIT Woman Resource Centre directed to providing for predictive girls from school communities the opportunity to develop their skills in the field of IT and became a leader in their communities. This project was marked as a finalist of 2006 award for excellent usage of IT for development among 160 participants of international contest of Development Gateway Foundation [15].

In addition school communities' representatives as a result of participation at educational contests and projects receive grants to take part at international conferences and seminars. In July 2007 Anna Vaganyan 10th grade students of Nukus school #1, Violetta Kartunova 10th grade students of Fergana Parvoz gymnasium and Karligash Ishanova teacher of English of Nukus school #1 were awarded by the International Education and Resource Network (IEARN) to participate at their 14th Annual International conference in Cairo (Egypt) [16]. In August 2007, Anna Vaganyan 10th grade students of Nukus school #1 and Sharifa Djurabaeva UNDP Project coordinator were awarded to Women2Women Cultural Exchange and Leadership Conference that took place in Boston (USA) for their active participation on educational projects realization and achieved results [17]. At both conferences participants received new knowledge, skills and experience on educational projects participation directed to solving of social issues of local communities as well as conducted presentations about Uzbekistan, its culture, history, traditions and their experience on participation at educational projects and gained results.

5 Summary

In summary I would like to note that IT might be used for enrichment of educational process as well as in solving of social issues of school communities in a way of realization of educational projects. In order to use IT by representatives of school communities in the future for realization of issues on social protection of vulnerable level of population and in achievement of sustainability in that direction it is necessary to organize a number of actions that include elaboration and organization of educational projects, IT clubs attached to ECC and preparation of volunteers, retraining courses of representatives of school communities and participation of parents committees in ECC activities etc. Given actions may include the following thematic sections: "Volunteers in Uzbek communities", "Teaching of IT for disabled", "IT in realization of professional, communicational and educational goals", "Experience on working on educational projects directed to solve social issues (social protection of inhabitants, attracting additional funds, placing in a job of disabled and etc.)",

"Activities of school communities on sustainability of ECC (no-break Internet connection, constant diagnostics of equipment and solving technical problems, school communities' web sites support and etc.)". As a result of those projects and educational courses it is proposed to create by representatives of school communities of online resources as web sites, online forums, web logs, list serves and electronic library that include advanced experience that undoubtedly will be favourable in further solving of social issues that exist in school communities of Uzbekistan.

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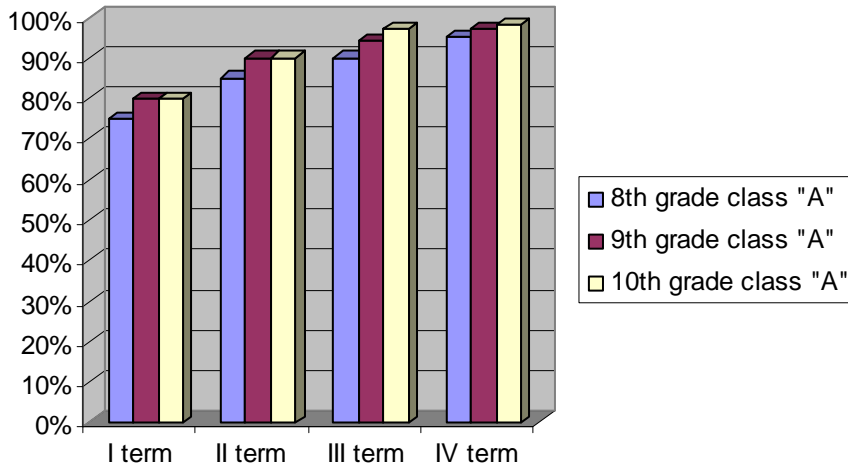
Author:

Rustam Shadiev, Field Coordinator
"Capacity Building for Internet Technologies Development and Promotion in Uzbekistan" Project, UNDP

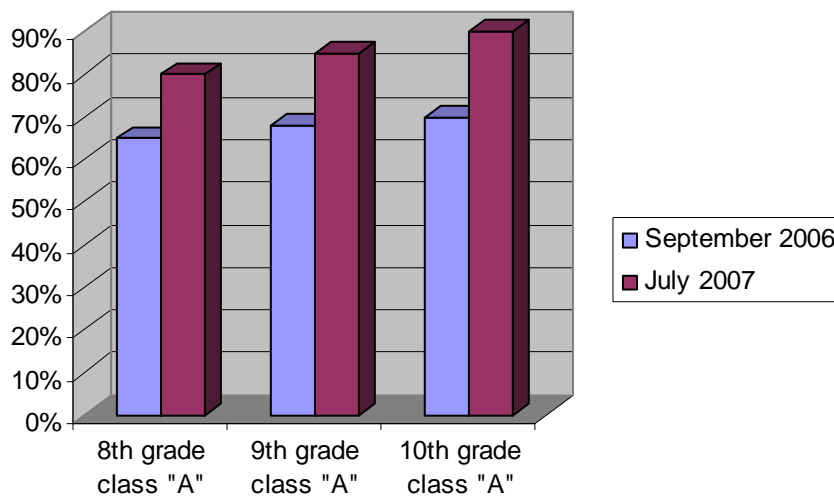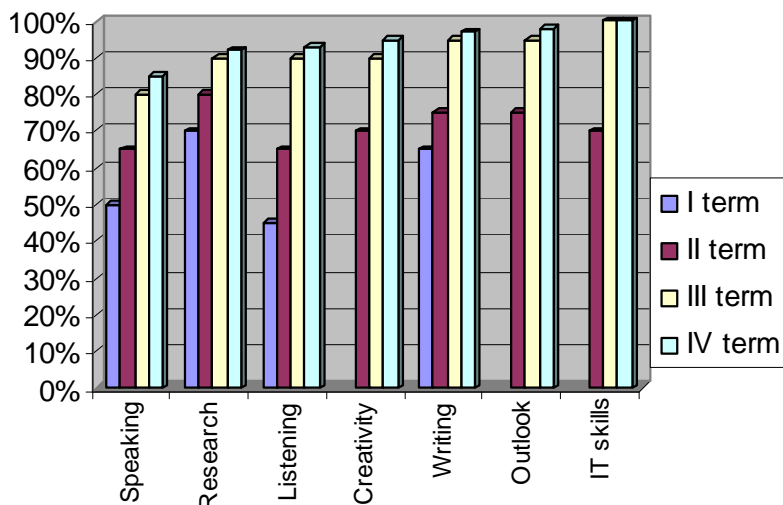Address: 2, Mavlyanova Str., Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 700084
Email: rustamsh@yahoo.com

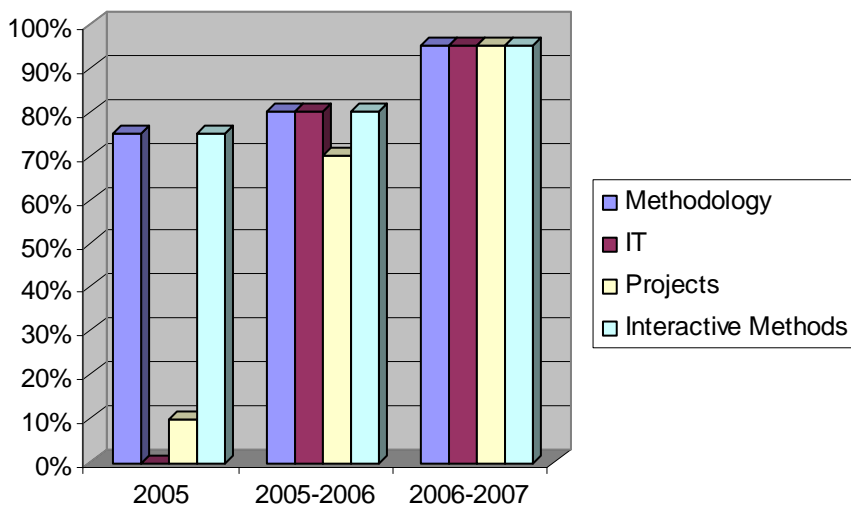**Diagram 1. The comparative analyze of the quality of education.**

Legend:
- 8th grade class "A"
- 9th grade class "A"
- 10th grade class "A"

Categories: I term, II term, III term, IV term

Diagram 2. Students' Desire and Interest in the lesson.

Legend:
- September 2006
- July 2007

Categories: 8th grade class "A", 9th grade class "A", 10th grade class "A"

Diargam 3. Acquired students' skills and abilities.

Diagram 4. Teacher's self - assessment

Table # 1. International Schools CyberFair 2006-07 Winners from Uzbekistan

No	Project name	School, region	Category	Award
2006				
1	Sport and Healthcare http://nukus11.connect.uz/cf/	School # 11, Karakalpakstan Nukus, Uzbekistan	Local specialties	Honorable mention
2	Kok-Gumbaz http://karshi12cf.741.com/	School # 12 Kashkadarya Karshi, Uzbekistan	Historical landmarks	Honorable mention
3	Uzbek Literature http://namangan5.connect.uz/literature/	School # 5 Namangan, Uzbekistan	Local Music and art	Honorable mention
2007				
1	Handcrafting of Andijan http://andijan.connect.uz/cyberfair/index.html	Specialized Boarding School # 43 Andijan, Bulakbashi, Uzbekistan	Local Music and art	Platinum
2	Antakiya Ancient City http://hodjeyli71.connect.uz/cf2007/	School #71, Karakalpakstan Hodjeyli, Uzbekistan	Historical landmarks	Gold
3	Rishtan Ceramics for Future Generations http://parvoz.connect.uz/ciberfair/	School 40 Parvoz Ferghana, Uzbekistan	Local Music and art	Silver

Table # 2. Women Internet Festival 2006-07: nominations and participants

Nomination #1	Nomination #2	Nomination #3	Nomination #4	Nomination #5	Nomination #6	Participants
2006						
Best picture depicting the role of IT in the life of women	Best website dedicated to women of Uzbekistan	Miss Internet of Uzbekistan (Best Knowledge of Quick Search for Information on the Internet)	Best Application of the Computer and Internet in cookery and needlework	Best Use of the Computer in Professional Activity		140
2007						
Best picture, poster, collage, poem or song, depicting the role of IT in the life of women	Best website, web log, or publication in Internet, developed by women of Uzbekistan	Best Knowledge of Quick Search for Information on the Internet	Best Application of the Computer and Internet in cookery and needlework	Best story or essay about experience of ICT use on the topics: "Me, my Family, and ICT" and "How I learned computer and Internet."	Miss Internet of Uzbekistan	350