

# Enlightening Demands of Russians

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**Abstract.** The article presents the results of a large-scale survey conducted by Russian «Znanie» Society in 2017. The survey measured citizen awareness of local and national enlightenment initi-

atives, interest in specific topics and formats of educational events, motivation for learning and development, and willingness to pay for educational products, and it also tested the concept of an online enlightenment portal. We analyze the current globalization trends affecting the formats, topics and technology of enlightenment as well as educational niches that could be of public interest and of benefit to the digital future. Conclusions are made about the most in-demand fields of study and format preferences in learning and development.

**Keywords:** enlightenment demands, enlightenment programs, sociology of enlightenment, lifelong learning preferences in Russia, attitude towards learning and development programs, Russian «Znanie» Society.

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## Enlightenment in the USSR and in Modern Russia

Enlightenment as a social activity is flexible and responds to the needs of society by expanding the horizons of people; helping to overcome obsolete stereotypes; contributing to the systemic synthesis of current knowledge; revealing the horizons of emerging knowledge [Grigoryan 2010].

The modern concept of “enlightenment” is different from the concept of “Enlightenment” of the XVIIIth century and from the concept of “promoting education”, which was used in Soviet society. The concept of “enlightenment”, according to many social philosophers and historians of science, is semantically connected with a certain stage in the formation of a culture of a new historical type. The term “The Age of the Enlightenment” is traditionally referred to XVIIIth century. The concept of “enlightenment” itself even without correlation with the historical period focuses not only on addressing gaps in education-

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Russian by  
A. Gurariy.*

al level of population, but also on its moral component. Vladimir Dal stressed that “the literacy itself will not reason with the peasant, it will rather confuse him, not enlighten him”<sup>1</sup>. The Soviet scientific thought presented the concept of enlightenment ideologically: the tendency to eliminate social injustice, ecclesiastical obscurantism and philosophical mysticism was its inherent characteristic [Yakushkina, Ilakavichus 2016]. Currently, the concept of “enlightenment” has shifted from ideological towards utilitarian and technological meaning. We define it as an activity to promote a wide range of educational opportunities, achievements of science, technology and culture provided by state, commercial and public institutions and to spread it among the population for a fee or free of charge. Modern enlightenment has also a function of educating the population in the interests of society and the state [Maksimenco 2011] and is focused, as previously, on reducing the gap between million-plus cities and provinces in regard to the level of public awareness.

In addition to the utilitarian character, educational activities of modern Russia have several other features that distinguish them from the approaches which were typical for the Soviet-era. Among them is the predominance of individual learning over collective one, as well as the predominance of body practices (sports, diets, etc.) over spiritual and philosophical ones. As for the most in-demand skill to develop, it is a self-orientation in a rapidly changing world. Educational programs are expected to help individuals with finding some motivational drivers and a personal path in life, rather than with understanding a scientific view of the world, expanding one’s horizons and *unchaining the world* which was typical for Soviet era.

Under the circumstances of increasing speed of life and suffering from Future Shock [Toffler, 2002], an individual would rather prefer to *enchant* the world: to filter and to manage information flows and to search for harmony in rapidly changing environmental conditions. At the same time, there is a lack of a preventative approach in a general strategy of promoting educational activities [Pomelova 2009].

The image of an educator developed by the scientific and educational associations of the Soviet era has also undergone significant changes. Vladimir Lenin [1967] depicted Russian educator as a person who struggled against church dogmas, hated serfdom and fought for freedom, self-government and total Europeanization of Russia, as well as for upholding the interests of the masses presented mainly by peasants. The modern educator is not just a person who struggles against pseudoscience; his aspirations are not limited by receiving prestigious awards from various educational associations. Researchers depict an educator also as a person who is ready for some mis-

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<sup>1</sup> V. I. Dal’s letter to the editor of the magazine “Russian Conversation” // Russian Conversation. 1856. Vol. III.

sionary work and dedicates himself to educational ideals [Solomonov 1993]. The contribution made by an educator distinguishes him or her from a number of promoters of ideas and products often lobbied by the industry.

The enlightening education has been extremely fragmented both in content and in learning formats for the past 20 years in Russia: high-quality projects coexist with unprofessional ones; volunteer movement is supported by state or regional funding. There isn't any official list of educational organizations and projects they hold in modern Russia, which significantly reduces the effectiveness of educational work across the country and limits the possibilities for coordinated interaction [Maksimenko, Danilov 2017]. Along with the science popularization projects (*Postnauka*, *Kurilka Gutenberga*, *Science Slam*, *Nauchpop*, *Pint of Science*, and others), there are various educational activities which are becoming popular: learning with animations, religious education, educational tourism, and other types of educational entertainment (edutainment). There are not only traditional educational institutions such as museums using interactive exhibits to promote education, but also different forms of hedonistic educational activities. Institutions for adult education (folk high schools) are still popular among people over 50 years old.

### **Studies on Enlightening Education Preferences of Russians**

The information on enlightening educational preferences of Russians and preferred learning formats could be provided by special surveys. Such surveys could also provide information on skills and some personal features of an individual taking part in educational activities. There were no surveys on this issue during the Soviet era, since the party system centrally approved the list of topics brought to the public attention. There were plenty of surveys on lifelong learning and professional development learning formats (advanced trainings) for professional society as well as its content in the post-Soviet period. At the same time, there was not any systematic nationwide social research on the issue.

The 2017 survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (WCIOM) by request of the Russian «Znanie» Society is one of the occasional studies on the phenomenon. The online survey was mainly concentrated on the interest of Russian youth (1500 respondents aged 16–25 years) in self-development courses and other educational trainings. According to the survey results, the respondents are mostly interested in developing creativity (50%), dancing, music, theater (24%) and sports (31%), as well as in getting a driver license (36%) when designing their personal development plan. The youth is also focused on developing communication skills (trainings on psychology and business education, 17-18%; public speaking, 12%); on programming (20%) and on enhancing information literacy by attending advanced IT Office Skills courses (14–15%). Although

the youth pays continued attention to developing their foreign language skills (20%), such an educational activity does not tend to gain more popularity in the near future. The professional development is also important for the respondents (22%) who are mostly interested in postgraduate studies (maximum response rate is among respondents aged 24-25 years).

The demand for an educational activity on certain topics is highly dependent on gender. So, men have higher interest in programming (22%), technology (23%), military-patriotic activities (16%), while women prefer music (32%), cooking (33%), foreign languages (25%), arts (27%), and trainings on psychology (21%), as well as fashion styling masterclasses (23%).

The results of the nationwide online-survey support our research hypothesis regarding practical character of the youth educational demands depending also on gender. According to the results, popular science is outside the youth interest.

The target audience of the survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (WCIOM) was presented by the youth aged 16–25 years. There is no representative or reliable data on the educational demands of other age groups.

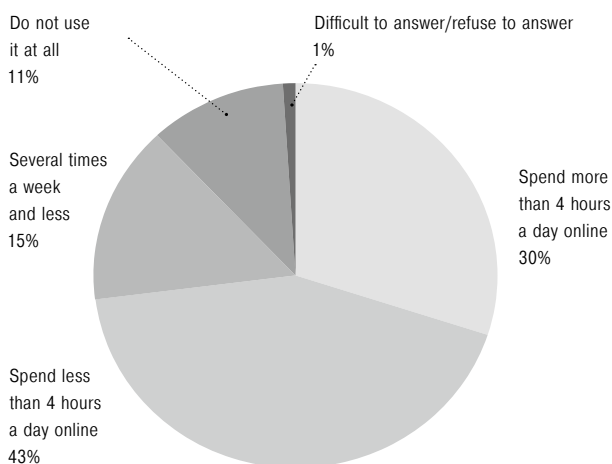
### **Empirical Basis of the Research**

The Kostroma branch of the Russian «Znanie» Society conducted the research in 2017 to evaluate the educational demands of the population. The data was collected using a formalized questionnaire followed by a telephone surveying technique (Computer-assisted telephone interviewing *or* CATI). A total of 1100 respondents participated at the research across Russia to achieve the following research goals: to ascertain the level of public awareness about local and national educational projects; to determine the degree of interest in various topics and learning formats; to measure motivation in terms of trainings; to evaluate the payment capacity of population with regard to educational products; to test the concept of an online educational portal allowing site visitors to subscribe to the newsletters by interests.

The central research question aims to provide the information on specific interests of population in educational projects: whether they intend to acquire skills in modern technologies and innovations in order to adapt to rapidly-evolving world (Future Shock) or not. One more assumption to be verified during the research was the theory that the population would likely take part at educational activities without charge when projects were one-time or short-term ones; but if there was a long-term project to develop certain skills, people, on the contrary, would be ready to pay.

The respondents of the survey were citizens over the age of 18 to represent gender, age and type of settlement. There were 54,3% of women took part at the survey. According to the respondents, 73% of them use Internet every day, while only 11% do not use Internet at all (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Internet usage among the survey respondents

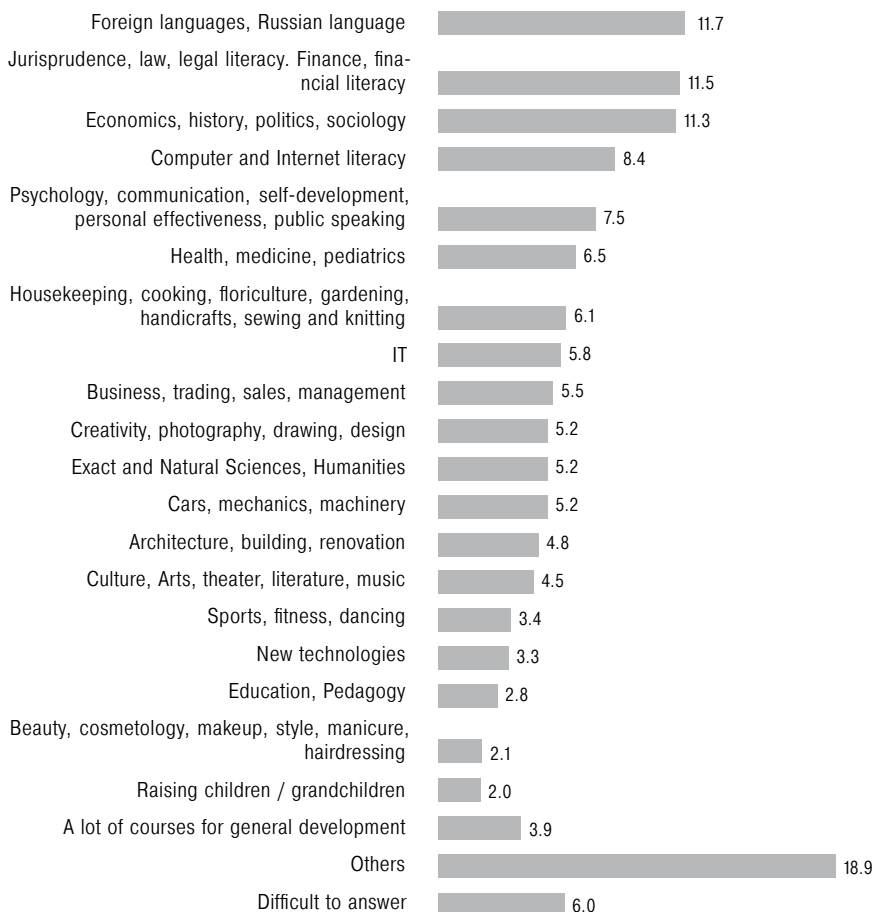


### Demand for Education

According to the survey respondents, 60.8% of them evaluate their educational background as inadequate and have a demand for further education. The above average level of demand for education is among women (the women in maternity leave represent another group among female respondents: their interest in new knowledge is especially high); among younger age groups (up to 44 years old); among daily users of Internet; among population of large cities; among employees, entrepreneurs, freelancers. The most popular training courses are the following: foreign languages (Fig. 2), including Russian as a foreign language (11.7%); legal and financial literacy (11.5%); general issues of history, economics, politics, sociology (11, 3%); computer and Internet literacy (8.4%) as well as self-development, psychology and personal effectiveness (7.5%).

Such topics as legal and financial literacy, self-development and psychology, health, IT-technologies, cars and machinery, education are mostly popular among younger respondents (up to 29 years old). Respondents aged 30–44 are also interested in gaining legal and financial literacy as well as personal effectiveness skills, while they are more focused than younger generation on developing their skills in business, foreign languages, architecture, building and renovation, and doing sports. Respondents aged 45–59 reported that they would also like to learn foreign languages, to improve their computer and Internet literacy, to develop their housekeeping and handicraft knowledge. Retirement age respondents are willing to get understanding of social issues (economics, politics, sociology, history); to develop their computer skills; to get skills in housekeeping and needlework; to get knowledge in the field of culture and art (Table 1).

Fig. 2. **Educational preferences of the survey respondents (%)**



According to the research data, the public awareness of educational projects and portals is very low, while the most cited ones are [edu.ru](http://edu.ru), [uchi.ru](http://uchi.ru), *Wikipedia*, *Synergy University (Moscow University of Industry and Finance "Synergy")*, *LinguaLeo*.

### **Personal Well-Being, Global Issues or Future Expectations**

The expert of SKOLKOVO Education Development Centre (SEDeC) Pavel Luksha has suggested the educational content classification. According to Luksha, there are three levels of knowledge: about personal well-being; about global issues; about future challenges. According to the survey respondents, they are mostly concerned about future challenges (Fig.3). 54% of respondents are interested in gaining specific skills to adapt successfully to rapidly changing environ-

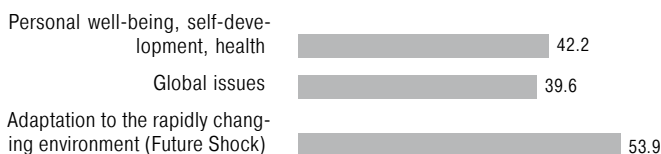
Table 1. **The most popular educational programs depending on age (%)**

Educational programs	Age (years)				Average results
	18–29	30–44	45–59	over 60	
Foreign languages, Russian language	10.4	12.2	13.2	8.5	11.7
Jurisprudence, law, legal literacy. Finance, financial literacy	14.2	14.6	7.5	6.0	11.5
Economics, history, politics, sociology	12.6	9.3	10.5	21.0	11.3
Computer and Internet literacy	0.6	3.0	15.1	26.0	8.4
Psychology, communication, self-development, personal effectiveness, public speaking	10.1	10.3	1.7	8.0	7.5
Health, medicine, pediatrics	8.9	5.0	6.1	7.6	6.5
Housekeeping, cooking, floriculture, gardening, handicrafts, sewing and knitting	1.7	2.5	12.6	10.7	6.1
IT	9.6	5.2	5.2	1.3	5.8
Business, trading, sales, management	2.8	7.5	6.8	1.0	5.5
Creativity, photography, drawing, design	5.9	5.7	4.9	2.7	5.2
Exact and Natural Sciences, Humanities	3.6	3.5	6.4	6.7	5.2
Cars, mechanics, machinery	7.2	5.7	3.7	3.2	5.2
Architecture, building, renovation	2.8	7.0	4.5	2.1	4.8
Culture, Arts, theater, literature, music	6.1	2.7	4.6	7.0	4.5
Sports, fitness, dancing	4.8	5.4	1.2	0.0	3.4
New technologies	2.8	2.1	4.4	5.9	3.3
Education, Pedagogy	6.2	1.7	2.2	0.8	2.8
Beauty, cosmetology, makeup, style, manicure, hairdressing	3.6	2.6	1.1	0.0	2.1
Raising children / grandchildren	2.6	1.8	1.8	1.9	2.0
A lot of courses for general development	2.8	1.9	7.6	3.9	3.9
Others	17.1	22.8	16.6	15.7	18.9
Difficult to answer	4.9	8.1	4.0	6.4	6.0

ment (Future Shock). The research data confirms Luksha's theory that an individual is scared of rapidly changing technology and innovations and confused by new terms and reality. Therefore, the introduction of new reality to the society should be one of the goals of the Russian Society "Knowledge".

The respondents also mentioned the following topics related to knowledge about personal well-being as most demanded (the response rate is more than 15%): healthy lifestyle and proper nutrition (21,6%),

**Fig. 3. Interest in lectures on various topics according to the survey respondents (%)**



legal and financial literacy (20,7%), adult and child health (20,6%), psychology of relations (17,6%), foreign languages (17,4%), basics of communication (15,3%), vocational guidance for children (15,2%).

As for the general knowledge, the respondents are interested in Russian history, culture, ecology, and regional studies (more than 17%). 16% of respondents would like to develop their media literacy skills to separate fake news from the truth.

According to the survey respondents, the future challenges are related to technological innovation in medicine, robotics, alternative energy sources and space exploration (the response rate is more than 20%). 15% of respondents are interested in cryptocurrency.

Therefore, the incoming issues and changes they will cause are one of the significant topics among educational demands of Russians. Whereas previously the population was mostly interested in gaining geographic knowledge (including space exploration) or understanding patterns in history, modern society is focused on trainings developing skills for an uncertain future. As a result, people search for those educational projects which expand their knowledge about life planning.

### **Preferred Learning Formats**

The main educational sources according to the respondents of the survey are television (TV shows, documentaries) (49,5%) and the Internet providing an access to online articles, webinars and videos (the response rate is more than 42%). Offline learning (lectures and master classes) are less popular: only 17–20% of respondents regard these formats as convenient and suitable for them. Perhaps the popularity is lower because these learning formats are usually not free of charge. 16% of respondents use groups in social networks and blogs to get new information (Fig. 4). Women are more likely to try different online and offline learning formats compared to men.

Table 2 represents the differences in the preferred learning formats depending on the age group. Respondents under the age of 44 are ready to different learning formats: within the framework of the survey they mentioned 2,7 options. The main sources of knowledge



**Fig. 4. Preferred learning formats according to the survey respondents (%)**



for this group of respondents are the Internet (reading online articles, watching webinars and online videos) and television. Younger people are also willing to attend offline educational events, such as lectures, workshops and trainings. They are twice as likely as respondents over the age of 44 to choose face-to-face educational activities. The one more difference between younger people aged 18–29 years from older age groups is their readiness to learn from bloggers and through social networks as well as to participate in online marathons.

Older generation mentioned on average only two possible learning formats. That means they are more conservative in their preferences and have a limited access to information. The main source of knowledge for them is television (62%). Although they do not often use the Internet, it has already become an important learning channel (32% of older respondents read online articles, watch online videos and webinars). As for the hobby groups, they are more popular among elderly people than among young population.

Therefore, the main educational sources are television (49,5%) and the Internet (42%). Face-to-face educational activities hardly gain 20% according to the research data. There are visible differences in preferred learning formats depending on age. Younger people are ready to try different learning formats, including new ones; they

Table 2. **The most preferred learning formats depending on age (%)**

Preferred learning formats	Age (years)			
	18–29	30–44	45–59	over 60
Online reading of articles or popular science magazines	45,2	45,0	41,9	32,4
Online watching of educational videos, webinars	46,4	49,9	37,5	32,0
Visiting lectures on various topics	27,3	21,7	14,4	16,0
Following blogs and groups in social networks on particular topics	23,7	18,2	11,8	9,3
Watching educational programs and documentaries on TV	37,0	47,7	55,0	62,2
Listening to audiobooks, podcasts	15,5	15,2	13,4	7,4
Participation in master classes	21,7	17,4	16,1	9,3
Participation in trainings	20,0	13,4	8,4	2,8
Participation in online marathons	10,1	12,1	7,2	2,0
Visiting hobby groups	9,8	12,6	13,6	16,0
Participation in intellectual games, scientific battles	13,8	8,0	9,8	8,0
Own option	1,4	4,3	3,8	4,6
Difficult to answer	1,3	1,2	2,7	0,0
Nothing. I do not want to learn anything	2,6	2,8	6,4	10,2

are prepared to learn from popular social media personalities (bloggers). Older people prefer to gain new knowledge from TV shows and through face-to-face communication (hobby clubs and lectures).

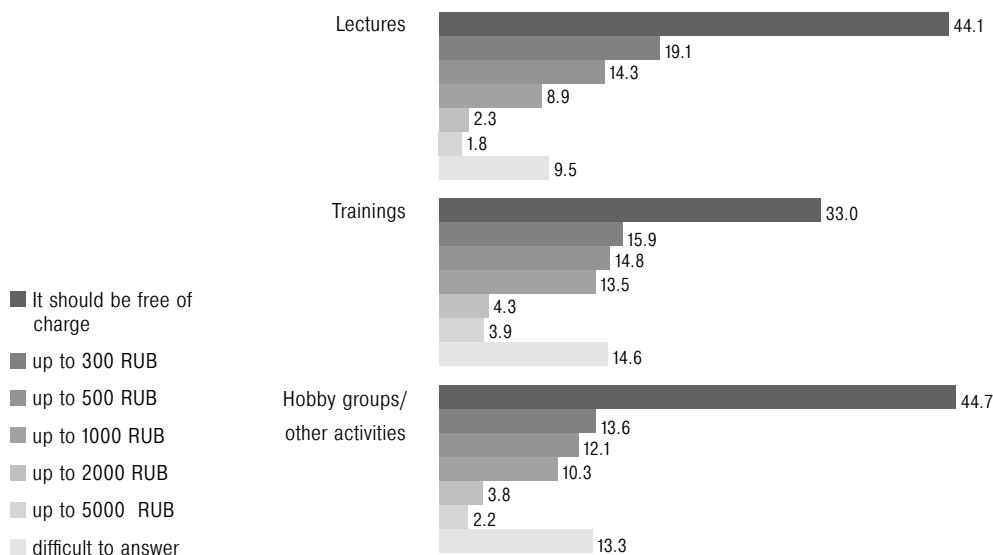
The respondents were also asked to list some key characteristics of an ideal educator. The participants of focus groups imagine an educator as intelligent, educated and influential person. Younger generation named Master Yoda as a suitable character, while older generation mentioned Fedor Aniskin as an example of an educator.

According to the list of jobs for the future, an educator refers to disappearing jobs which will not exist in 15–20 years. In order to prevent it, the Russian «Znanie» Society should provide educators with advanced trainings to improve their acting and public speaking skills.

### **Price for Educational Activities**

More than one-third of respondents suggested each educational activity should be free of charge (Fig. 5). This applies particularly to lectures and hobby groups (up to 45% of respondents expect them to be free of charge). In contrast, the most acceptable price for those who are ready to pay for lectures or hobby groups is up to 300 rubles (the response rate varies from 14 to 19% depending on the learning format) or up to 500 rubles (12–15%). According to the respond-

Fig. 5. **Acceptable price for educational activities according to survey respondents (%)**



ents, the cost of trainings and master classes can be higher compared with price for lectures or hobby groups. However, it does not suppose any educational events (meetings with scientists, intellectual games, hobby groups, etc.) to be free of charge or cost less than 300 rubles, since the survey was not focused on any particular event. Therefore, the price can be significantly higher in the specific case supported by effective advertising.

The attitude towards payment for educational activities is connected strongly with age and income rate: the older the respondent and the lower his or her income is, the more he or she expects educational activities costing little or nothing.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The interest in enlightening education and demand for gaining general knowledge on different topics are relatively high among Russian population. While trainings on foreign languages, accounting etc. are actively organized by different state and private educational organizations, the trainings on wide range of topics do not have any proper organizational system. Among these topics are the following: Internet literacy; legal and financial literacy for beginners; adult and child health; new technologies etc. There is also a demand for expanding general knowledge. The technologies of the future are of specific interest, because individuals are usually unfamiliar with them what makes them feel frightened.

Mass culture also affects Russians and their educational demands which are becoming more pragmatic. Such tendency undoubtedly actualizes the problem of preserving the spiritual heritage and its transmitting in intergenerational interaction.

The nearest future and transformations it will cause are one of the most important topics among educational requests of Russians, according to the research data. As a result, Russians are more interested in life planning strategies and tend to act more rationally compared to the past.

The television (49.5%) and the Internet (42%) are the major educational sources. Face-to-face educational activities hardly gain 20% according to the research data. There are significant differences in preferences regarding learning formats among different age groups. As for the age and income rate, they have an impact on an individual's attitude towards training fees: the older the respondent and the lower his income is, the more he or she expects educational activities to be free of charge.

Enlightenment might be regarded as a powerful resource for educational work which is neglected due to the interest of population for self-development trainings and gaining general knowledge. However, Russians are still interested in issues in national development; in education; in religion and its role in human life and society. In order to provide an individual with critical skills for the nearest future, enlightenment as a system should be based on expert opinion and should be ready to implement modern ways of communication with population. Such research as presented in the article can make a practical contribution to the issue.

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