



## YOUNG PEOPLE: ACTORS AND PAWNS IN POLITICS

### МОЛОДЕЖЬ КАК СУБЪЕКТ И ОБЪЕКТ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ИГР

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#### Political Education and Enlightenment of Russian University Youth: The Current State and the Potential of Gamification

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**Abstract.** This research paper examines the current state of political education and enlightenment among young adults attending Russian universities. The study uses a politico-psychological paradigm, viewing political education and enlightenment as means for controlled political socialization. Surveys of vice-rectors in charge of educational and youth policy at several Russian institutions provided empirical data, which was supplemented by views from academic and practical specialists. The surveys were conducted between late 2024 and early 2025. The findings highlight the importance of building a comprehensive strategy for implementing educational and enlightenment initiatives inside higher education institutions, as well as arguing for the incorporation of new pedagogical methods like gamification into these programs.

**Keywords:** political education, political enlightenment, political socialization, youth, gamification

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## Политическое образование и просвещение российской студенческой молодежи: актуальное состояние и потенциал геймификации

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**Аннотация.** Представлены результаты исследования актуального состояния политического образования и просвещения российской студенческой молодежи. Теоретической основой исследования является политико-психологический подход, в рамках которого политическое образование и просвещение рассматриваются как механизмы управляемой политической социализации. Эмпирическую базу исследования составляют материалы опроса проректоров российских вузов по воспитанию и молодежной политике и экспертного опроса среди ученых-исследователей и специалистов-практиков, проведенного в конце 2024 — начале 2025 г. Результаты исследования показывают, что существует потребность в формировании комплексного подхода к реализации образовательных и просветительских программ в вузах, а также в применении инновационных дидактических подходов к их реализации, основанных в том числе на технологиях геймификации.

**Ключевые слова:** политическое образование, политическое просвещение, политическая социализация, молодежь, геймификация

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## Introduction

A variety of factors contribute to the importance of studying political education and enlightenment among Russian student youth.

Firstly, our country and all of its residents are currently pursuing civilizational self-determination. The impact of sociocultural problems and threats connected with the loss of national identity and cultural heritage highlights the importance of preserving and strengthening traditional spiritual and moral values as a relevant foundation for the growth of the state and society<sup>1</sup>. This work is carried out within the framework of various areas of domestic policy, but special attention is paid to working with young people in the field of education, upbringing and youth policy.

Secondly, the modern young generation—internally heterogeneous and contradictory—is a convenient object for external mental influence due to the low level of its political competence, fragmentation and stereotypical ideas about the politics and state structure of our country [Selezneva 2022; Kasamara, Sorokina, Muravitskaya 2023]. In this regard, in recent years there has been an urgent need to form a system of political education and enlightenment that would complement the main educational processes and create a semantic framework for educational work with young people.

Thirdly, historical and modern experience of implementing political education and enlightenment exists both in other countries and ours [Kvitko 2003; Yarov 2005; Kazmin 2009; Suslov 2012; Vlasova 2012]. Of course, absolute copying of foreign or reproduction of Soviet practices is impossible in Russia today: from the point of view of value-semantic (ideological) content and organizational and methodological support, these processes must be built in accordance with current realities, that is, respond to sociocultural challenges taking into account the political context and socio-psychological characteristics of the younger generation. Therefore, educational and youth policies are faced with the task of developing modern approaches to political education and enlightenment.

## Theoretical Basis of the Study

The topic of political education and enlightenment is not central to modern academic discourse. The surge of interest in it is situational and is either associated with anniversary dates (for example, the 20th anniversary of political science and education in our country [Kovalenko 2009]), or is determined by the situational context—the formation and development of political science and education at the beginning of the post-Soviet period or their nationalization at the present stage [Boyko et al. 1997; Shutov, Ereemeev, Kuznetsov 2020]. Nevertheless, a certain experience has been accumulated in conceptual understanding and empirical study of issues of political education and political enlightenment—both in the subject field of political science [Shcherbinin 2003;

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<sup>1</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated 09.11.2022 No. 809 “On approval of the Fundamentals of state policy for the preservation and strengthening of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values”. Retrieved from <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/48502>

Gutorov 2009; Lantsova, Kornilova 2013; Khromenkov 2013; Koshkin, Zhidkikh, Novikov 2018; Gukova, Boyko, Polovneva 2021] and other areas of social and humanitarian knowledge (mainly psychological and pedagogical [Milovanov 2022; Golovanov 2022; Letunovsky 2023]). At the same time, in the modern public space and scientific discourse, there is terminological confusion and substantive uncertainty: a significant number of different concepts are used to denote similar phenomena and processes—“political upbringing”, “political education”, “political enlightenment”, “civic education”, “civic upbringing”, “civic enlightenment”, etc. [Korshunova 2009; Amanova 2012; Khromenov 2013; Nigmatullina 2023]. The scope and content of these concepts overlap to a significant extent, and they themselves are often used as synonyms. This significantly complicates the process of scientific research, since it requires conceptual precision and rigor in the application of the Conceptual-categorical apparatus.

The consideration of issues of political education and civic enlightenment of Russian student youth in this article is carried out based on the political-psychological approach as a fundamental theoretical and methodological framework for the study [Shestopal 2013; Palitay 2016]. This approach allows using the conceptual and instrumental-methodological potential of various social and humanitarian sciences for a comprehensive analysis of the process and result of a person’s entry into the political world [Shcherbinin 1996].

The provisions of the theory of political socialization [Shestopal 2005; Van Deth, Abendschon, Vollmar 2011], which are the direct basis of the study, allow us to consider political education and enlightenment as its mechanisms [Popova 2019], which determine its manageable nature [Shcherbinin 1996]. The theoretical and methodological provisions of the sociology and psychology of youth, which are used in the framework of the analysis [Radaev 2019; Selezneva 2022; Zubok et al. 2022], make it possible to take into account the age and socio-psychological characteristics of student youth as the target audience of political education and enlightenment programs. Organizational and methodological aspects of the issue are understood based on the developments in the field of educational work and youth policy presented in the scientific literature [Popova 2019; Samsonova 2018; Klyucharev, Trofimova 2016; Zadonskaia 2016].

In this study, political education<sup>2</sup> is defined as an activity carried out within the framework of educational programs and aimed at developing the political (civic)

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<sup>2</sup> Here it is important to pay attention to the distinction between the concepts of “political science education” and “political education”. M. Oakeshott, dividing political education into universal and professional, wrote: “The system of universal (free) education is formed in schools, and the system of professional education—in universities. In these systems, three main aspects of political education are realized: the formulation, consolidation and transmission of the general foundations of the political worldview, the mastery of the entire set of political disciplines and preparation for participation in elections and for professional political activity” [Oakshott 1962]. In the domestic tradition, this division is designated by the definitions of “political” as a universal education aimed at the formation of political knowledge and competence [Shcherbinin 1997; Glukhova 2021] and “political science” as a specialized education that is associated with the formation of professional competencies of specialists in the field of political professions [Kovalenko 2011; Chikharev, Stoletov 2017; Bronnikov, Tsybryaeva 2021].

competence of an individual. Political enlightenment is carried out outside the framework of educational programs and is aimed at developing a political picture of the world, value-worldview orientations, and the civic position of an individual.

### **Characteristics of Empirical Research**

The article presents the results of a political and psychological study conducted in November-December 2024 among vice-rectors for youth policy and educational activities of Russian universities using a survey method. 161 respondents took part in the study.

A formalized interview guide was created with questions of various kinds, including closed, semi-closed, open, and questions with ordinal scales, in order to find out vice-rectors' opinions regarding the state of political education and enlightenment in higher education today and its future prospects. The projective approach of incomplete sentences was also supported by the toolkit.

The study participants represented educational organizations of various types (state educational institutions of higher education; private educational institutions of higher education; educational institutions of higher education under the jurisdiction of federal authorities; educational institutions of higher education under the jurisdiction of regional authorities; educational institutions of higher education with the status of an autonomous non-profit organization), differing in the size of the student body (up to 5 thousand people, from 5 to 13 thousand people and more than 13 thousand people). In addition, the respondents had different experience in the field of youth policy and educational activities.

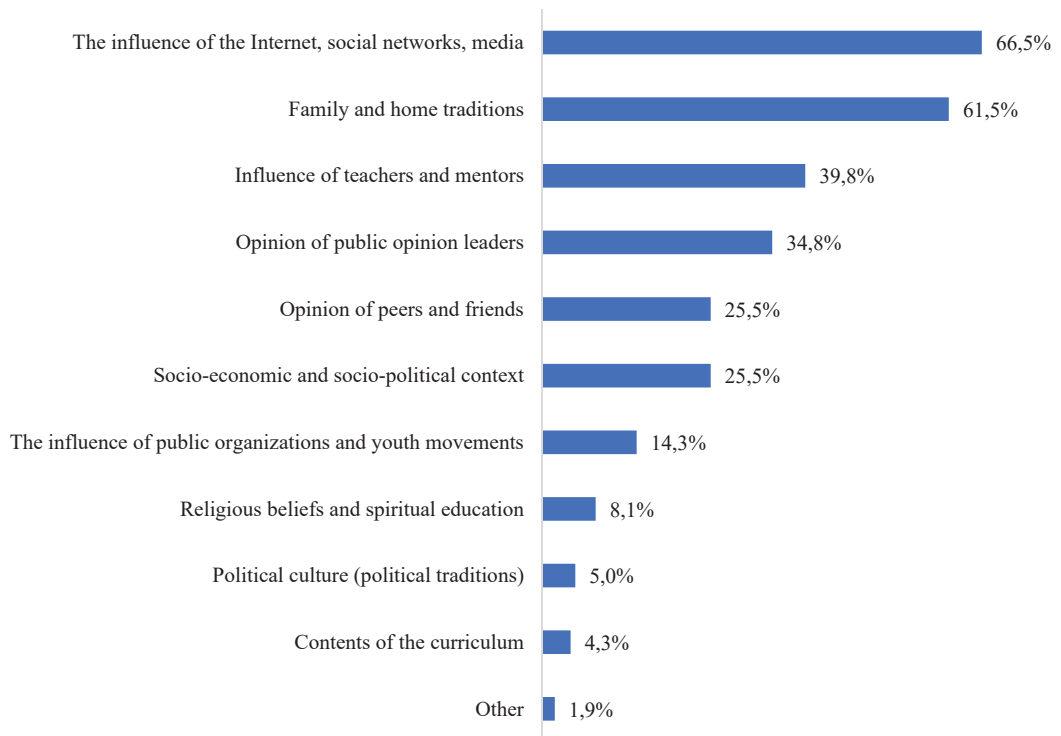
The answers to open and semi-closed questions were subjected to coding, scaling and further statistical processing. All data obtained were subjected to frequency analysis, multiple response analysis, correlation analysis using specialized software (IBM SPSS Statistics 27, MS Excel).

Additionally, the study used materials from 10 expert interviews conducted by a team of authors in December-January 2025 with domestic researchers in the social and humanitarian fields (historians, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, teachers) and practitioners from government bodies, government agencies and public organizations implementing political education and awareness programs in the Russian Federation.

### **Results and Discussion**

According to the participants of the study, the process of political socialization of modern Russian youth is determined by the influence of a whole complex of factors (Figure 1).

According to the vice-rectors, digital technologies and media platforms, including the Internet, social networks and messengers, and the media, have the greatest influence on the formation of young people's political orientations today. At the same time, the study participants noted the key role of family and traditions passed down from generation to generation and forming a moral foundation for the harmonious development of young people in the existing sociocultural and political realities.



**Figure 1.** What factors, in your opinion, have the strongest influence on the political socialization of Russian youth and its formation in the spirit of civic consciousness and patriotism? (multiple choice)

Source: Data collected by A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

Other “adults” also have a noticeable influence on young people—teachers and mentors, as well as public opinion leaders. It is noteworthy that the answer option “Contentst of the curriculum” scored less than 5 %, which may indicate the secondary nature of formal educational mechanisms compared to the influence of authority and personal example of people directly or indirectly involved in the formation of political orientations of modern youth. In particular, this concerns the teaching community, whose representatives form and maintain the general atmosphere in the educational environment and have the strongest and most lasting influence on the formation of the worldview of student youth in the process of their personal development.

Political socialization of young people is carried out, among other things, through the mechanisms of political education and civic enlightenment, which are aimed not only at forming certain knowledge about the world of politics, but also a conscious civic position, a value attitude to the surrounding objects of socio-political reality. Experts noted: *“The university plays a key role in this process. It is at this age in the life of every young person that his target guidelines, attitude to certain processes that are taking place in the country are formed”* (male, 37 years old, practicing specialist).

According to the survey participants, the key tasks of civic education work with young people today are the formation of a sense of citizenship, patriotism, pride and respect for their homeland, which, in turn, requires increased attention to issues of preserving



historical truth, improving the forms and technologies of effectively countering attempts by unfriendly countries to distort the history of Russia, as well as popularizing the achievements and exploits of our ancestors among young people (Table 1).

In our opinion, such a distribution of answers is connected with the awareness of the urgent need to preserve and strengthen the all-Russian national identity. In the conditions of a global value crisis, this task acquires existential significance for Russian society and the state—the education of “correct” feelings towards one’s homeland and the formation of a complex of objective scientific knowledge about its history is the key to preserving the unique sociocultural characteristics of the Russian people, stable and effective development of the Russian state.

Discussing the most effective ways of developing civic consciousness and patriotic orientations among modern student youth, the study participants assigned a key role in this process to teachers (mentors, curators, etc.) who work individually with students. At the same time, as the experts noted, the degree of teachers’ involvement in the process of political socialization of student youth largely depends on their personal civic position: *“University administrations only create conditions and prerequisites for the political socialization of students. Students, as a rule, do not know vice-rectors and other administrative staff, but teachers can have a serious influence on the political socialization of students, and this depends on the civic position of the teacher. Out of ten, at best, one teacher is ready for cooperation with students outside of lectures and seminars”* (female, 28 years old, research scientist).

Table 1

**What tasks of civic education work with youth, in your opinion, are the most relevant and significant at the present time? (multiple choice, %).**

Answer options	Share of respondents' answers
Formation of a sense of civic consciousness and patriotism, pride and respect for one’s country	56.5
Preservation of historical truth (combating distortion of information about Russia, its history and current events)	55.3
Popularization of Russian history (formation of a sense of respect for the heroic past of our country, including preserving the memory of the exploits of the defenders of the Fatherland)	41.6
Formation of critical thinking skills	32.9
Preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Russia (popularization of the achievements of Russian science and technology, literature, art, music and sports as a national heritage)	29.8
Popularization of the historical experience of interaction between the peoples of Russia as a single nation (the diversity of peoples as a distinctive feature and advantage of the Russian state)	24.8
Ensuring interethnic and interfaith harmony among young people	17.4
Increasing political literacy and skills of interaction with government institutions	16.1
Motivation to participate in social and political life	11.8
Others	1.2

Source: compiled by A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

In addition, the vice-rectors noted the high importance of students' participation in educational events that allow students to form stable political views in the context of interaction with a social group, as well as their participation in the work of youth public organizations (Table 2).

Table 2

**What, in your opinion, are the most effective ways of developing civic consciousness and patriotic orientations in modern students? (multiple choice, %)**

Answer options	Share of respondents' answers
Individual work of teachers and mentors with students (curatorship, mentoring, consultations)	59.0
Events within the framework of educational work at the university (curatorship hours, talks, student clubs)	56.5
Participation in the activities of youth and other public organizations	54.0
Extracurricular educational programs, projects and courses (trainings, seminars, excursions, forums)	49.1
Mass events at the local, regional and federal level (forums, festivals, memorial events)	39.1
Conversations with parents and relatives	34.8
Classes within the framework of the main curriculum (political science, history, ORG, etc.)	31.7
Communication with peers	18.0
Elective classes, special courses and additional modules in academic disciplines	2.5
Other	2.5

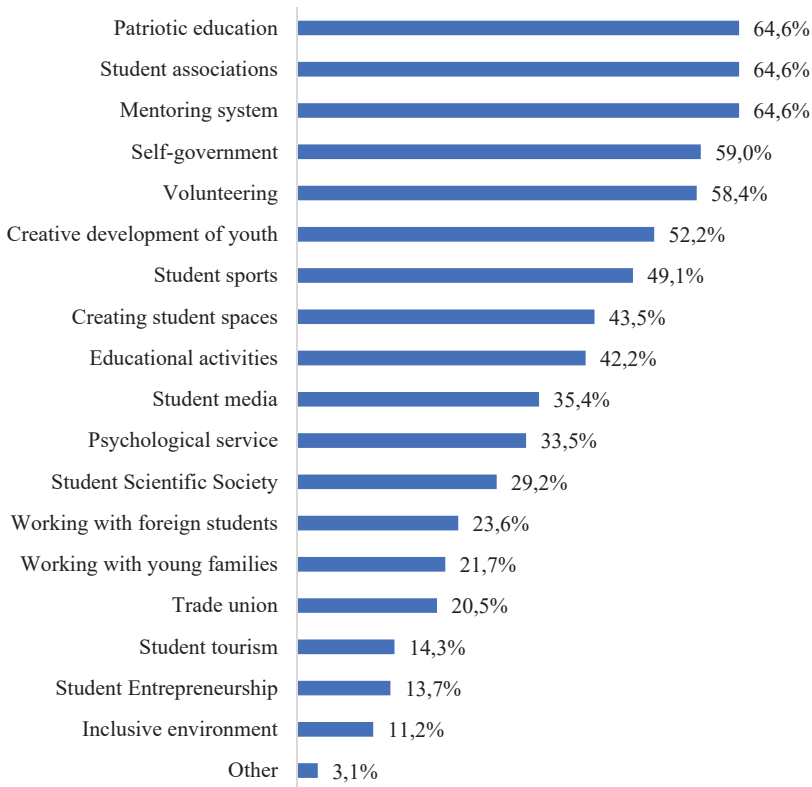
Source: compiled by A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

Extracurricular educational activities, as well as cultural events, also play an important role in the process of forming the civic consciousness of young people. According to the vice-rectors, participation in such forms of activity has a beneficial effect on strengthening the patriotic orientations of students. At the same time, the participants in the study noted the need for a clear correlation between the content and meaning of the programs of such events and the current goals of the national development of the Russian Federation.

When answering the question about the most effective types of educational work at the university, vice-rectors most often mentioned patriotic education and mentoring, as well as various forms of activity for the students themselves: student associations and self-governing bodies, volunteering and creative sections (Figure 2).

The respondents emphasized that educational work at the university should be a comprehensive system of activities of theoretical and practical orientation. Maintaining such a balance will not only contribute to the formation of patriotic orientations in young people, but will also ensure their consolidation as a moral imperative through activities, and will also prepare the younger generation for active participation in the socio-political life of the country.

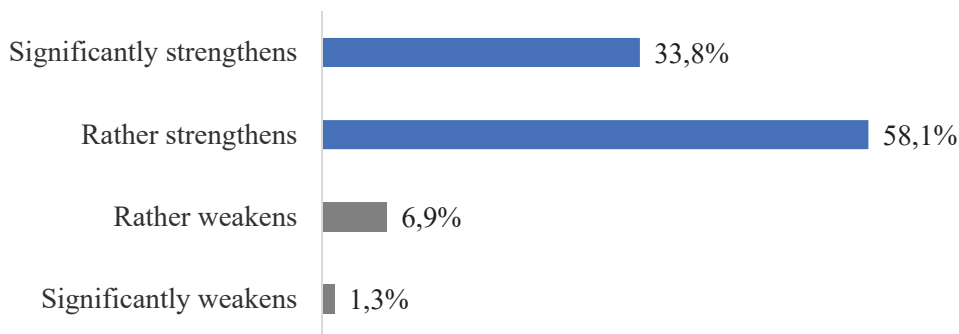




**Figure 2.** What types of activities, in your opinion, are the most effective elements of educational work at the university? (multiple choice)

Source: Data obtained A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

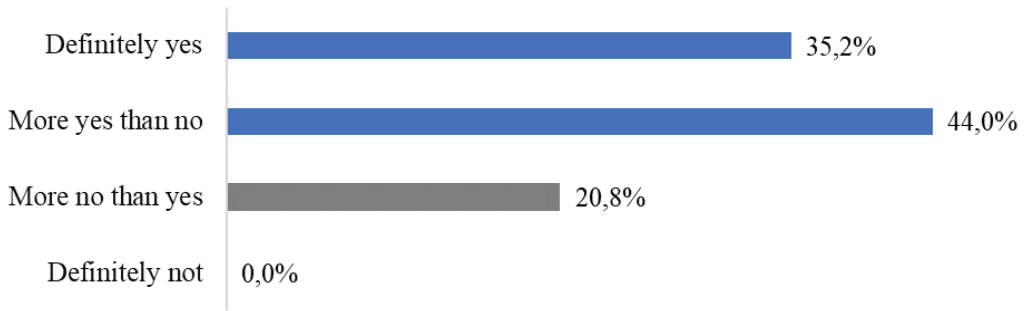
The overwhelming majority of study participants believe that the educational process in higher education institutions has a beneficial effect on the formation of civic consciousness and patriotic orientations of students, strengthening them (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** How, in your opinion, does the educational process in modern universities influence the civic consciousness and patriotic orientations of students? (single choice)

Source: Data obtained by the A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

At the same time, most vice-rectors noted the existing need to improve the quantity and quality of students' knowledge about current events taking place in Russia and abroad (Figure 4), and also emphasized the need to adapt the content of educational programs to the rapidly changing socio-political context.



**Figure 4.** Do you think that there is currently a need for the majority of students at your university to increase the volume and quality of knowledge about the socio-political processes that are taking place in the country and the world? (single choice)

Source: Data obtained by the A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

The most sought-after knowledge that a modern student needs to develop civic consciousness and patriotic orientations is knowledge about the history, culture and traditions of their country (Table 3).

Table 3

**What knowledge, in your opinion, is necessary for a modern student to develop civic consciousness and patriotic orientations? (multiple choice, %).**

Answer options	Share of respondents' answers
Historical knowledge (knowledge of the history of Russia, native land, other regions, significant historical events and personalities)	88.8
Cultural knowledge (knowledge of the culture, traditions, customs, literature and art of Russia, knowledge of the culture, customs and traditions of the peoples of Russia)	78.3
Political knowledge (knowledge of the features of the political system and state structure of Russia and its subjects)	42.9
Knowledge of state symbols and public holidays of Russia (understanding the history of formation and modern meaning)	34.2
Geographical knowledge (knowledge of the natural, climatic and socio-economic features of the regions of Russia)	23.0
None of the above — knowledge is of no importance for civic consciousness and patriotism	0.6
Other	0.6

Source: compiled by A.V. Selezneva, N.N. Rogach, A.A. Braines.

It is noteworthy that almost all study participants agreed that there is a connection between the level of knowledge and developed civic consciousness among young people.

At the same time, the strength and nature of the influence of the educational process on the formation of civic position and patriotic orientations in students depend not only on the content of the programs themselves and the involvement of teachers, but also on the educational technologies used.

In order to effectively implement the need to increase the quality and quantity of knowledge, which will become a solid foundation for the further formation of patriotic orientations and civic position of young people, it is necessary to develop and implement new formats of civic education work with students in the educational and upbringing processes.

Such formats, according to the participants of the study, can be based on modern didactic approaches and gamification technologies, which implies the widespread introduction of various game mechanics and technologies into the process of political education and civic education at the university. As the researchers note, “game-based explanatory models of the surrounding reality, perceived by players as real, become the foundation for the further formation of mass ideas about the real historical and political reality” [Volodenkov, Fedorchenko, Belov, Karlyavina 2024]. The use of these technologies will make the content of educational programs and extracurricular activities more exciting and interesting: “This is one of the ways to improve the inclusion and involvement both in the process and in the result obtained” [Bogdanova 2022].

In the processes of political education and enlightenment, games can be used not only as additional tools within the framework of various forms of work, but also as independent and self-sufficient technologies. In the latter case, we can talk about various types of games: board games, role-playing and business games, video games [Belov 2022; Bogdanov 2022].

Participants in the expert survey, discussing the possibilities and limitations of using gaming technologies in the educational process, noted that their widespread implementation will not only diversify the “routine” process of teaching students, but will also have a beneficial effect on the formation of a stable value attitude to the content of the subjects studied and the issues raised in the game interaction<sup>3</sup>. This attitude will subsequently become the driving force behind the students’ actions. In addition, various game mechanics intensify the interaction of the student group and the teacher, which has a positive effect on the development of practical skills and competencies in students.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be especially emphasized here that, unlike other methods and forms of educational and outreach work, which are aimed primarily at transferring knowledge and forming ideas (the most striking example is lectures), gaming techniques, while certainly solving cognitive problems, are focused, first of all, on forming an attitude as an ideological disposition expressed in behavioral practices. Studying political games proper, A.V. Bogdanov notes: “within the framework of gaming technologies, a targeted impact can be exerted on the subjects of the gaming process in order to form a stable and unambiguous attitude towards certain historical events, towards statesmen, towards the modern socio-economic and political structure of a country, region or any particular organization” [Bogdanov 2022].

At the same time, experts drew attention to a number of limitations caused by both objective and subjective factors. Among the most significant, the most frequently mentioned was the lack of time and resources of the faculty: *“A teacher has little time for extracurricular work with students. A young teacher, whose wife is on maternity leave and who has a small child, is often below the poverty line in terms of income from one job. To overcome this poverty line, you need to take a second and third job. There is no time left for extracurricular work that a teacher can and would like to do”* (female, 28 years old, research scientist).

Another problem identified was the “institutional inertia” of the management of some universities, which manifests itself in a lack of interest in the issue of introducing such technologies into the educational process: *“The problems of introducing such technologies are related to the inertia of the university management, the lack of interest of teachers and staff, the established corporate culture, and the formal framework of educational programs”* (male, 53 years old, specialist practitioner).

Participants in expert interviews indicated that experienced teachers accustomed to traditional formats (lectures and seminars) are wary of using interactive game methods, while young specialists are often overloaded with their current work and need additional methodological support.

Thus, the implementation of the practice of using gamification technology in universities largely depends on the motivation and professional openness of the teaching staff, as well as on the systematic support of the university management.

## Conclusion

The conducted research made it possible to identify key trends and prospects for the development of political education and enlightenment of Russian student youth.

Today, a special role in the formation of political orientations and civic consciousness of the younger generation is played not so much by the institutional environment and event context, but by the personal example and authority of the people around the students—mentors, parents, and opinion leaders.

This trend actualizes the issue of revising approaches to organizing the process of civic and educational work with young people. The study allowed us to identify the existing need for a comprehensive approach to the implementation of educational and educational programs aimed at developing civic consciousness and patriotic orientations in today’s young generation.

The current socio-political realities push us to the need not only to update the content and meaning of the curriculum, but also to actively develop and implement innovative didactic approaches in the educational process. These include gamification technologies, which, through the creation of an interactive and immersive environment for students and increasing their interest and involvement in socio-political processes, have a high methodological potential for more effective education of a harmoniously developed and socially responsible personality based on traditional Russian spiritual and moral values. Provided there is a comprehensive approach from the university administration, methodological

support from teachers and youth workers, innovative educational technologies can become an effective tool for the formation of a mature civic position and patriotic orientations among Russian student youth.

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