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## ISO STANDARD IN THE FIELD OF LEARNING SERVICES AND THE PROSPECT OF ITS APPLICATION IN RUSSIA

**Abstract:** *The article considers peculiarities and the prospect of the practical implementation of a rather new standard developed by ISO and adopted in Russia. The objective of ISO 29990:2010 is to provide a generic model for quality professional practice and performance, and a common reference for learning service providers and their clients in the design, development and delivery of non-formal education and training.*

**Keywords:** *International Standard, non-formal education, learning services, Quality Management System*

### 1. Introduction

Technical Committee TC 232 of the International Organization for Standardization developed ISO standard 29990:2010 Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers (ISO 29990, 2010). Studying the document we first tried to accurately translate the title of it from English into Russian. A conventional version was chosen as the result of consultations with professionals working both in education and standardization. Since 4 years ago the Academy for Standardization, Metrology and Certification (Moscow) has been promoting the standard, and recently the first Russian registrar offering services in the field of voluntary certification against ISO 29990:2010 was established and started working with

organizations seeking such certification.

### 2. Main part

#### 2.1. Training aspects

In different cultures approaches to training vary significantly. This is why it was quite difficult to show nuances of the training process notions. Let's consider the fundamental term 'education'. Practically in all dictionaries we can find the synonyms training, teaching. The Russian dictionary explains the following way: "Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, teaching, and enlightenment" (Evgenyeva, 1995). So, the notion process of acquiring knowledge involves the notion education itself. In English the word learning is usually used for the notion acquiring knowledge, it being different from teaching – training. The word 'training' has been used rather recently in Russian language and it usually means improving certain skills by exercising something systematically (Sklyarevskaya

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and Vaulina, 2004). As the word collocation learning services is accepted there is no need to look for more accurate versions. Besides the version services in the field of teaching will most likely require some sort of object – teaching whom or what. We can say almost the same about the notions training and preparation. The word training is almost always used with adjectives: actor training, psychological training, corporate training etc. The term preparation is used in such word collocations as preparation of experts, staff preparation, preparation of auditors etc. As we see compromises are inevitable in interpreting the Standard title.

## 2.2. Formal and non-formal education practices

Another problem is that the Standard belongs to the field of non-formal education. In the journal *Competence* we can regularly read of discussions about the ways of university education development, the work of preparing educational standards, problems of professional retraining of specialists (Bulanova, 2011, and Trinko *et al.*, 2010).

However, the word collocation educational standard (university standards, for example) involves certain requirements for competences, knowledge, understanding, skills of the graduates. ISO 29990:2010 is different per se and it is important to define possible application fields of the document for understanding the prospect of its application in Russia. So, we have to define more exactly the terms and definitions.

TC 232 specialists use the notion non-formal education in accordance with UNESCO's principles. They see non-formal education as “any organized and stable educational activity outside established recognized formal education”.

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

UNESCO an agency of the United Nations established November 16th 1945 to promote the exchange of information, ideas, and

culture. It is headquartered in Paris. Nowadays UNESCO has 193 member states. Its purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter for all the peoples without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

In that respect, the non-formal training can be carried out both within the bounds of educational institutions and outside them in order to satisfy wants of people of different age. The non-formal education can include programmes aimed at the elimination of illiteracy among the adult population, elementary education programmes for children not going to school, it depending on conditions of the country. It can be teaching skills needed in daily life, at work, teaching things of general culture etc. The non-formal education programmes do not always have to follow step-by-step training principles and they can involve various training duration (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). We can point it out that in Russia the term non-formal education is generally used in the connection with the development and application of special teaching techniques different from routine methods of formal (school, higher) education (Zitser and Zitser, 2007).

In defining the notion non-formal education the UNESCO's experts used the way from the contrary. This contraposition cannot be called quite strict. Such words as ‘absolutely different’ and ‘...do not always have to...’ point out at some rather differences than key contradictions. In the history of philosophy and pedagogics the formal education ideas are admitted to be related to the names of I. Kant and I. G. Pestalozzi (Brokgauz and Efron, 1975).

**Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804) – a German philosopher widely considered to be a

central figure of modern philosophy and the ancestor of German classical philosophy.

The fundamental philosophical works made him one of the outstanding thinkers of XVIII century and influencing the further development of the world philosophical ideas. Kant's major works are:

- the Critique of Pure Reason (1781)
- gnosiology (epistemology);
- the Critique of Practical Reason (1788) - ethics;
- the Critique of Judgment (1790) - an aesthetics

**Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi** (1746–1827) – a Swiss pedagogue and educational reformer who exemplified Romanticism in his approach. He emphasized that every aspect of the child's life contributed to the formation of personality, character.

Pestalozzi made an important influence on the theory of physical education; they developed a regimen of physical exercise and outdoor activity linked to general, moral, and intellectual education that reflected Pestalozzi's ideal of harmony and human autonomy.

Supporters of formal education affirmed that the school attention should be aimed at the development of learning abilities of students, their thinking, imaginativeness, memory, willpower instead of getting large volume of knowledge. In their opinion the developing influence of studying science (or its branches) on improving student intelligence is much more worth than learning basis of science. So, at first the notion formal education was related to personality formation, it correlates to V. I. Dal seeing that has become canonical, V. I. Dal pointing out the root 'character, image' of the Russian word 'education'. Therefore in Russian to educate is in a way means to help forming a character or an image (Dal, 1994).

**Vladimir Dal** (1801–1872) – an outstanding Russian linguist, lexicographer, writer, ethnographer, doctor. The author of Explanatory Dictionary of Living Great Russian Language in four volumes (1864)

It also correlates to modern approaches to human capital rating (Bulanova, 2011, and Zitser and Zitser, 2007).

Sociologists give some consideration to the matter of formal education quite often as well. They state that the formal education involves being in the society some special institutions and organizations carrying out training process as well as developing educational system in accordance with officially admitted pattern that define the volume of acquired knowledge, teaching certain skills and actions which have to be according to normative canon of a person (citizen), approved in the society and to normative requirements for social roles common for the society involved (Schugurensky, 2014). A programme or a course can be seen as part of formal education if after finishing it the learner gets the certain package of legislatively prescribed rights, such as the right to carry out the payable professional activity in accordance with the type of the training course, the right to apply for a higher position, the right to apply for educational institutions of higher standard. The grounds of getting the rights involved are a diploma or other state certificate (Maslova, 2004).

In the context of ISO 29990:2010 the notion non-formal education can be applied for any kinds of programmes, courses, trainings not being programmes of basic school or university education. These initiatives can be applied within the bounds of educational institutions, various training courses and seminars not being related to programmes for training students or graduate students directly taking place in many institutes, academies, and universities. There is a chance for carrying out training courses outside the educational institutions as well. The history of developing the environmental audit and environment management systems in Russia shows that social organizations played the most active part in creating and trying training programmes in the middle of 1990-s (Sheldon and Yoxon, 2006). We think that it is not worth limiting the range of

application of the standard by the condition of getting or not getting the state certificate. It should be pointed out that nowadays the multinational TC 232 team has also developed another standard, namely ISO 29991:2014 Language learning services outside formal education – Requirements (ISO 29991, 2014). Results of discussions with the Russian Academy for Education and a brief market survey of the services involved show that the professional course learners choose programmes ensuring them to be prepared to pass TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS exams.

An international exam and standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers. The test is developed at Princeton University, New Jersey, United States of America. The test was originally developed at the Center for Applied Linguistics under the direction of Stanford University applied linguistics professor Dr. Charles A. Ferguson. The main objective of the TOEFL is measuring the basic language skills for the non-native English language speakers. Getting and presenting the TOEFL results are necessary condition for applying for more than 7500 educational institutions in 130 countries of the world.

Passing the TOEFL is necessary for taking part in many programmes of training at the English language educational institutions. Some certification test programmes for research and professional training also require passing TOEFL. The TOEFL certificate is necessary document in applying for universities in other countries for MBA learning programme. The TOEFL scores are valid for 2 years; then they are no longer reported.

### **2.3. Aims and objectives of the standard ISO 2990:2010**

The new document establishes requirements for the educational institution management system and so it is quite similar to the

principles of international standards setting requirements to Quality Management Systems. The goal of developing ISO 2990:2010 was formulated by TC 232 members in the following way: is to provide a generic model for quality professional practice and performance, and a common reference for learning service providers and their clients in the design, development and delivery of non-formal education and training. This International Standard focuses on the competency of learning service providers. It is intended to assist organizations and individuals to select a learning service provider LSP who will meet the organization's needs and expectations for competency and capability development and can be used to certify learning service providers.

The authors of the standard point out that the notion learning is preferential in comparison with the notion training that is acquiring knowledge, the result of preparation is of great importance and the widest range of approaches, methods having proved the effectiveness for the certain subject or audience should be used for achieving the result.

The standard establishes learning process forms, namely: professional trainings, continuing education (adult education), corporate trainings, both by the company specialists and involving the outsourcing (Global report, 2009).

We think that such learning services as staff advanced training, occupational retraining, training experts in the field of development and application of standards as well as certification system, management system. A significant part of educational programmes is carried out in the form of various trainings, short-time courses, practical seminars etc. The result of learner preparation depends a lot on the systemacy of approaches and management system stability of the provider of the learning services involved.

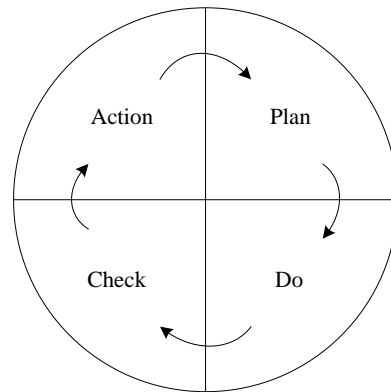
## 2.4. Basic principles of an educational establishment management systems

Modern management systems accord with tendencies to the development of business the society in general. Models of systems follow the tendency to the development of market economy: decentralization of management, active provider network integration, employing contractors for carrying out certain functions at the company (outsourcing), enhancement of the role of information technologies etc. The management system model describes the action features in running the organization in different fields. The proper standards include common minimal indispensable conditions for effective functioning of the system of the kind.

However, the standards are not related to a certain organizational structure and they do not set the organization a limit in applying different kinds of management approaches. The standards do not require the strategic and medium-term planning to be formally available but they involve them as well as the delegation of authorities in fact. Perfecting (consistent improvement) of the management system involves financial factors, it being impossible without the developed system of incentives and motivation.

All modern models of the management system are based on the cycle of periodic planning, evaluation and activity revision – PDCA cycle or Shewhart – Deming cycle (Figure 1).

The basic principle is that planning is primary and plans for the certain cycle have to be carried out if there are no strong reasons for declining them. The evaluation and correction of both directly faulty and ineffective actions, improvement of models and planning mechanisms for achieving new continually developing goals become possible under the condition.



**Figure 1.** Shewhart – Deming cycle

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The approach of the kind allows us to improve the regular activity of the organization, it reducing its dependence on the human factor (mistakes of the people). Principle of the management system consistent improvement accords to the Deming cycle idea as well.

It is necessary to mention, that nowadays a new standard is being developed by ISO (within a special Working Group ISO/PC 288/WG 1), namely ISO 21001 Educational Organization Management System – Requirements with Guidance for Use.

Its authors argue that education differs from other sectors in that it is an intangible service which cannot guarantee that the learner will actually succeed. The learner may not be satisfied with the outcome (fail) but the quality of education may well be excellent. Learning involves the internalization of knowledge, methods and skills and depends very much on the learner’s ability to do this. The educational organization must provide the framework, input, processes, learning

material etc. but cannot guarantee that the learner will learn from it. An educational organization must provide the preconditions for learning, create stimulating learning environment and provide timely and relevant support.

It is undeniably true, but we reckon that draft ISO 21001 Educational Organization Management System – Requirements with Guidance for Use is less specific than ISO 29990:2010. Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers and will probably be more useful for formal education than for learning service providers working outside schools and universities.

Development and application of the special procedure for finding out demands for learning services are necessary stages of applying the management system by organizations providing services in the field of non-formal education. It is a very important item because the failure of many courses and programmes is often due to the fact that demands for learning process are quite fuzzy and the preparation levels of the learners are too different. The problem has become a topical one lately even for the higher education system. Quite often the students applying for universities after having passed final tests (so called Unified State Exams, USE) are not able to acquire the university subjects which can be different from the ‘main’ Unified State Exams. So, a part of students eventually have to be evaluated in their first years for finding out if they need some sort of supplementary learning services.

In accordance with the new standard before providing learning services for finding out demands of both learning providers and learners should ensure that:

- in terms of a qualification analysis, information is obtained about learners' relevant education and training;
- history and prior learning, including qualifications and credentials

awarded to them, and that this information is obtained and used with legitimate consent;

- specific aims, wishes, goals and requirements of interested parties in undertaking or commissioning the learning service are determined;
- where relevant and feasible, learners are provided with the support they need in assessing their own learning needs and goals;
- any needs relating to language, culture, literacy, or other special needs relating to disability are identified;
- relevant interested parties are consulted to determine how they expect the skills, competencies and awareness developed as a result of the learning service to transfer to the learners' work-related tasks and responsibilities, and about what the sponsor will consider to be indicators of success;
- an agreement is reached and recorded with the sponsor on the learning service to be provided.

In terms of the very learning content, learning service providers should ensure that:

- the learning content and the learning process take into account the needs of any interested party;
- available means and information are used to effectively analyse issues arising from the specific learning content and process (e.g. prerequisite skills, specific requirements for the learner);
- the learning methods and materials to be used are appropriate, accurate in terms of their content, and sufficient to meet the stated goals;
- the learning content and process take into account learning outcomes.

These requirements seem to be very important because only the learning content reflecting training needs of learners can help

to achieve results satisfying both trainers and learners.

Current practices of smaller providers of learning services suggest that there are other aspects, which play a rather important role, namely training resources and learning environment.

In these fields ISO 29990:2010 requires that learning service providers should ensure that:

- all resources as defined in the curriculum are available;
- all facilitators responsible for delivering the learning services have these learning resources available and are trained in their use;
- all resources as defined in the curriculum can be accessed by the learners.
- the learning environment is conducive to learning; if learning is organized at premises of other organizations (for instance, at an industrial enterprise), a learning service provider has to negotiate minimum requirements with the industry management.

## 2.5. Application ranges of the new standard

Clearly defined requirements of the standard can find the application just now particularly in developing courses on the power efficiency increase for various industries. However, it is necessary to remember that the learners interested in acquiring practical ways for increasing the power efficiency of the buildings, for example, are essentially different from the learners aimed at acquiring knowledge in the field of developing and applying energy management systems. Nowadays quite often the learners (working in industry as well as designers) turned out to be confined within the programme of the only course whereas the use of some methods (like on-line

calculators for energy consuming) can be quite popular among the youths, but directors of big companies can be prejudiced against them a lot (Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator).

The standard includes requirements for learning service providers, monitoring the application of the programmes and evaluating the results, as well as for carrying out preventing and correcting activities, etc. There is no doubt that the management system involves carrying out internal audits and evaluating the system by the management, taking into account the learners' opinion as well.

Another feature of the standard, which makes it attractive, is a set of requirements to the curriculum (programme) development. It is especially important in Russia, where the very educational system is focused on curricula and where educational establishments have to comply with so called State Educational Standards describing curricula in detail.

Let's consider requirements of ISO 29990:2010 in terms of curriculum development. Learning service providers should:

- develop and document a curriculum and means of evaluation that reflect and are appropriate to the aims and learning outcomes specified;
- select methods of learning, including autonomous learning, which:
  - 1) respond to the aims and requirements of the curriculum;
  - 2) are appropriate for the learners;
  - 3) take into account the various needs of individual learners; and
  - 4) take advantage, as appropriate, of the group's potential to provide resources and support for individual and collective learning;
- Clearly specify the role and responsibilities of the interested

parties, including the learning service provider itself, when delivering the learning services, and when monitoring and evaluating transfer of learning.

All serious educational programmes are worked out and applied undoubtedly in consideration of the results of evaluating the needs of the interested parts, the decision about the contents of the course and the teaching methods is made taking into account the learners' personality and so on. However, streamlining and documenting of the better procedures, wider application of management systems corresponding to the standard ISO 2990:2010 will speed up the development of the civilized service market in the field of non-formal education. The systems of the kind should become the norm at least for the consulting firms that claim to train the company specialists planning quality management system application, environmental management, energy management, health management systems and industrial safety professionally and quite well. We consider the requirements of the new standard to contribute to the firms reproducing the same teaching materials for universities and water supply and sewerage enterprises being excluded gradually from the learning service market.

## **2.6. First steps towards ISO 29990 implementation in Russia**

In the Russian Federation, educational establishments such as schools, colleges, universities, etc. are obliged to comply with so called Federal State Educational Standards (FSES). FSESs are subject (profession) oriented standards and establish minimum requirements to competences obtained by pupils (students) as the result of taking particular courses (disciplines). Lists of compulsory courses are also included in FSESs. As far as non-formal training is concerned, all establishments offering language or dancing, driving or swimming, management or marketing courses have to

get state or regional licenses, but there are no requirements concerning compulsory disciplines or final abilities of trainees. Thereby non-formal training establishments in theory should be interested to assess their practices against ISO 29990 requirements.

As it is mentioned above, discussing opportunities with the Russian Academy for Education, we found out that language training establishments are focused on offering TOEFL-oriented services (please see 2.2). In Russia, most clients of non-formal training providers have never thought of asking about conformance with any standard. Still, there is a group of organizations that is more receptive than others, namely, providers of management training courses. It is not surprising since their clients are interested to get certificates of quality, environmental or energy auditors, and/or gain knowledge necessary to develop modern management systems in their organizations.

The Academy for Standardization, Metrology and Certification has been collaborating with regional providers of management training since 8-10 years ago, even though some companies act as competitors to the Academy and its regional branches. Still, we found some areas in which we can collaborate successfully, in particular – in environmental and energy management and auditing. In Siberia, we have a number of partners who have been offering environmental legislation, waste management, environmental management and auditing, energy efficiency training along with quality management training. They form our target group for ISO 29990:2010 implementation.

At the initial stage of our study, we made sure that key requirements of ISO 29990:2010 are fully understood by the top management of our partners and discussed peculiarities of training needs assessment and curriculum development. Training resources oriented at adults working professionally in the field of management



were found to be well-prepared using modern computer techniques. Practical exercises were conducted at industrial enterprises; quite often representatives of these enterprises were members of groups trained.

It was found that monitoring the delivery of the learning services is often conducted by both providers themselves and by the third parties, such as sponsors of training workshops and (in case of environmental conservation oriented courses) by representatives of environmental authorities.

Evaluation reports of service providers involved in the study are transparent and clearly describe the learning service, the learning service objectives, the findings, and also the perspectives, procedures and rationale used to interpret the findings. Best results are obtained by companies with strong leaders interested in the implementation of new approaches to providing learning services and often developing new courses for various clients.

In spring 2015, a voluntary certification system was registered in Russia in full accordance with the RF legislation. The first registrar ('Innovations in Technical Regulation' Ltd) started assessing two Siberian companies which had participated in our studies earlier. So far the first certificate is granted to the Centre for Environmental Auditing and Management located in the city of Tomsk.

We plan to continue working with Russian providers of non-formal training services and disseminate information on opportunities of

voluntary certification against ISO 29990:2010 requirements.

### 3. Conclusions

The team of researchers at the Academy for Standardization, Metrology and Certification as an educational establishment of the Federal Agency for Technical Regulation and Metrology is ready to confirm and prove the data mentioned above in practice, having started to test the requirements of the international standard ISO 29990:2010 Learning services for non-formal education and training – Basic requirements for service providers.

We have been writing articles, running consultations, supporting interested learning service providers and promoting ISO 29990:2010 in Russian regions. In accordance with the Academy nature, we have been working with organizations offering quality environmental and energy management courses as well as training in the field of metrology and quality assurance.

Recently, the first registrar has been established thereby opening opportunities to learning service providers to obtain a formal third party recognition. Several organizations providing training in the field of management systems are already preparing all necessary documents and practices to be assessed by the registrar. Centre for Environmental Auditing and Management has become the first Russian learning service provider certified against ISO 29990:2010 requirements.

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