

Use of Social Microblogging to Motivate Young People (NEETs) to Participate In Distance Education Through www.eBig3.eu

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Abstract -Young people, who are the fundamental asset of our economies and societies across the world, face a real and increasing difficulty in finding a decent job with each day. Three additional merging factors are worsening the youth employment crisis even further, causing challenges while transiting to decent jobs, namely (i) numbers of discouraged youth, in other words, young people, who are neither in education nor in employment or training (NEETs) are increasing, (ii) unemployment among university graduates of tertiary education in general are rising and (iii) potential NEET group students, especially in the 1st year, who, apart from reduced study fees, require extra motivation and moral support from educators. What can be done to solve the dropout crisis with microblogging possibilities? Many educators have found that microblog Twitter is a great help tool to increase student participation and further engagement in lifelong education once they have left the classroom. The use of e-learning in itself does not constitute an enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning, but it is a potential enabler for such enhancement. The provided examples of good practice illustrate how certain initiatives address challenges and seek to effectively engage learners. The study aim - to make young people NEET problem analysis in order to understand their motivation to engage in distance learning process. The first insurance against unemployment is quality education and training. Distance learning project eBig3 is example of unique way to promote reintegrating young people into the labour market and education too.

Keywords—youth; NEET group; microblogging; Twitter; e-learning; distance education; www.eBig3.eu.

I. INTRODUCTION

The immediate future of Europe depends upon 94 million of Europeans aged between 15 and 29. Apart from the challenges that young people have been facing for generations while embarking upon adult life, this generation lives in the era of all embracing globalization and has to cope with responsibility for ageing population. So it is a matter of great concern that these young people have been hit so hard by the economic crisis, said at the document “*The Youth Employment crisis: Highlights of the 2012 ILC Report, International Labour Office (ILO), 2012*” [1]. In 2011, only 34% of young people were employed; this is the lowest figure that Eurostat has ever recorded. Unemployment figures also

testify significant difficulties that young people face while entering the labour market; since the start of recession, youth unemployment has increased by 1.5 million reaching 5.5 million (21%) in 2011.

Serious as these statistics may be, they do not adequately capture the situation of young people because many are students, and hence, are classified as out of the labour force. For this reason, European Union (EU) policymakers have been increasingly using the NEETs concept: ‘not in employment, education or training’. This concept is included in document “*NEETs: Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe, 2012*” [2]. In principle, the definition is straightforward; it refers to those who currently do not have a job, are not enrolled in training or are not classified as students. It is the measure of disengagement from the labour market and perhaps from society in general.

The European Parliament has expressed ‘serious doubts’ about the scale of the actions proposed by the European Commission (EC) to address a high rate of youth unemployment that the EU is facing now when the average rate of youth unemployment has reached 23.7% and is affecting many member states. Since 2010, on the initiative of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Culture and Education of the Parliament, practical actions aimed at promoting youth employment have been regularly proposed. All recommendations of the Parliament will be included in the report *Youth Unemployment: Possible Ways Out* prepared by Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska (2013/2045 (INI) (in progress)). One of the main targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy is that the share of early school leavers should be under 10%.

Unfortunately, youth policy is still not high priority in Latvia, although the EC has already adopted a very important document, the European Parliament resolution of 18 May 2010 on “*An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering*” (2009/2159(INI).

This report on the Baltic youth policy in line with the EU strategy for youth, as a contribution to the creation of the Baltic youth policy statement, was published.

Report-research (100 pages and references) on youth policy in the Baltic states was drafted by Dace Ratniece [3], in 2012.

According to ILO data for 2011, there are 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the world and about 90% of them live in developing countries. The current population of young people is the largest the world has ever seen [1].

Let us look at some data on youth unemployment in Latvia.

January 2013: The total number of unemployed people in Latvia was 107.488. 11.001 (10%) of all unemployed people are young people between the ages of 15 and 24. The majority of them, 7.074 (64%), have been unemployed for up to six months.

Long-term unemployment in Latvia is continuing to rise. Do we have any specific ideas how to save this "lost generation", while there is still time to do so?

A. The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to identify potential scenario of distance learning and self-development of youth using a variety of collaborative and motivational approaches, microblogging and social networking on Twitter and the digital environment as distance learning tools.

B. Research object

The object of this research is to explore motivation that enhances advancement of young people in the NEETs group and participation in the distance learning process. Social network microblog Twitter could become a successful digital media tool to involve NEETs in distance learning by using appropriate pedagogical and psychological methods of motivation.

C. Objectives of the research

- To analyze philosophical, pedagogical and psychological literature as well as articles on computer science that evaluate e-learning.
- To study self-expression and self-development of young people microblogging on Twitter.
- To define pedagogical and psychological techniques of motivating Twitter users NEETs to participate in distance learning.
- To identify drawbacks of distance learning courses.
- To develop distance learning courses by taking into account the needs of NEETs and thus ensure their integration into society.

D. Expected results

- Self-expression skills of NEETs will increase and that will lead young people to further professional development (microblogging on Twitter and digital distance learning tools).
- Self-development capabilities of NEETs will increase.
- NEETs will become more aware of their own potential, belief in their own abilities will increase and their motivation to study and develop further will be stimulated.

After this introductory part, we present in Section II the general position of our work in the field of NEETs problems solving through cyberspace. In Section III we present results. Section IV concludes the paper.

II. GENERAL POSITION

While preparing the report [3], we have drawn particular attention to the issue of young people in the NEET group. Young people are giving up on the job search altogether because of low prospects of ever finding a job during the crisis or low prospects of finding a decent job according to their skills. School dropouts exposed to gang culture and drugs at a young age or young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds also face diminished chances of gaining employment.

Unemployment among university graduates, graduates of tertiary education institutions in general has been rising [1]. That is either because of the deterioration of education standards or a mismatch between graduates' skills and available jobs. This phenomenon causes concern for several reasons:

- Contradicts the assumption that higher education increases employability.
- Suggests that high-cost investment into higher education is wasteful because social return from unemployed graduates is low.
- Increases "brain drain" of skilled youth from many developing economies.
- Causes personal and political frustration.

Some important features that NEETs share:

- 1) *They have gained skills and knowledge outside the formal system.*
 - 2) *They more often tend to be at disadvantage in terms of, for example, capabilities, level of education, background (immigrant families) or economic conditions.*
 - 3) *They more often tend to remain unemployed, their integration into the labor market is more difficult, concludes Researcher G.Pollock at the article "Youth Transitions: Debates over the social context of Becoming an adult" [4].*
- Cyberspace helps young people find someone to share their interests and needs with. It is the new medium of

communication and parents are often unaware of what information teens share on social media. Teenagers explore their identities, experiment with behavioral norms, date and build friendships Correa et al. [5].

Many young people like microblogging on Twitter. Twitter it is one of the fastest growing social networks in the world. What is better than to post information in 140-character tweets? Compared to other complicated platforms, Twitter is engaging and simple. Its development was inspired by cell phone text messaging and its creators instinctively or knowingly became the inventors of the most uncomplicated social media systems said in the project "Our Featured Projects, NJI Media" [6].

Twitter provides a social platform for discovery of new connections, weak links according to sociologist Mark Granovetter. If Granovetter is right, it is through weak links that we learn about new ideas, are exposed to different concepts and our status quo is shaken up. Twitter is characterized as a simple tool for personal or professional use, an outlet for keeping up with the news, sharing of information, crowdsourcing [7].

D. Ratniece started microblogging on Twitter and got involved in problems that NEETs face. This inspiration came from analyzing the aspects of microblogging Y. Amichai-Hamburger [8]. For good microblogging one firstly needs to know how to build a profile. The ideas of profile building are as follows [9]:

1) *Create a unique identity*: a Twitter profile is very important. How to make tweets more personable and human? People are more likely to communicate with real people so you should add a little of your character to your tweets and make some genuine connections. Establishing a personality means creating a character, if you have not got one yet. It is important to have a good profile page with a Picture and a descriptive bio (Fig. 1.)

2) *Tweet regularly*: tweeting on a regular basis will keep you in contact with your followers and that will also keep your page active. The optimum number of tweets per day may vary; but daily tweeting, 1-4 tweets per day, works for most users.

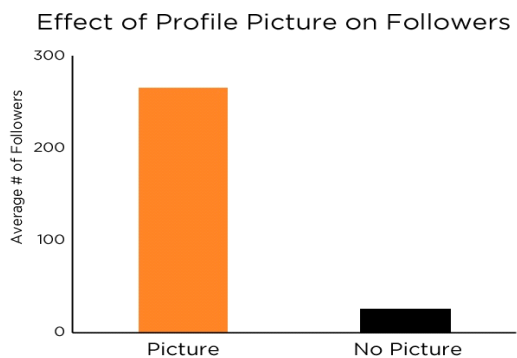


Figure 1. Effect of a profile picture on followers [10]

3) *Encourage your followers to retweet*: it is not always easy to get your information retweeted by other users but there are a few ways how to maximize. Use a Twitter Timeline to analyze your most successful retweeting periods, which could indicate the best time for you to tweet. Interacting with other users will help you build beneficial relationships and those who consider you a friend are probably more likely to retweet your information on a regular basis.

4) *Be interesting*: if you want to have more followers who care about you and what you share, make sure your tweets are interesting. Use «Tweeteffect» to get a detailed look at which of your tweets are gaining followers and which are causing to lose them. The result could be random or you could discover a pattern.

5) *Interact and share*: if you want people to share your tweets, you have to return the favor. Interact and share with other people and you will get 'thanks' in return. Join in big conversations and use the hash tag (#) to take part in trending topics but always stay relevant to maintain follower retention.

Given the above conditions, D. Ratniece [11] started talking to young people, microblogging on Twitter, and invited them to start training in distance education. Microblogging on Twitter attracts young digital media communicators and that may be used to identify and motivate youngsters, youth in the NEET group aged 13-25 years, to participate in distance education. Understanding the problems of NEETs may lead to solutions for distance learning and it would be more likely to generate involvement when free distance learning courses are offered by Kapenieks [12] and Ratniece [11].

EC report „Opening up education: innovative teaching and learning for everyone through the use of new technologies and open educational resources” [13] highlights that nowadays students need more personalized contact with teachers, greater cooperation and better links between formal and non-formal education, which can largely be implemented by school learning using digital technologies. In this respect the EU risks falling further behind other regions of the world.

In order to transform their education and training, the United States and some Asian countries are investing in ICT strategies. These countries are transforming their education systems by modernizing them and making them accessible internationally, thus achieving remarkable results regarding the accessibility to education and study fees, pedagogical practice and gaining of a global recognition. For example, a large proportion of digital content is provided by the market participants from outside the Europe, including educational institutions that offer training programs on a global scale through massive open online courses (MOOC) [12].

There is a particular need to worry about third group – potential NEET group students, especially in the 1st year,

who, apart from reduced study fees, also require extra motivation and moral support from educators.

Therefore, it is necessary to deal with the three groups of young people NEET:

- 1) Those who belong to NEET group.
- 2) Those who discontinued their university studies due to financial reasons and started a full-time job.
- 3) Potential NEET group of universities students, especially in the 1st year.

All three target groups share the same need: to gain experience or receive educational opportunities in order to get a steady job and sustain themselves financially. Are there any initiatives to address this situation, and if so, have they been successful? Of course, there are also extreme measures, such as migration, but would it help in the long run?

That is the case of the Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border project *eBig3* (Fig. 2). The project aims to create a network for cross-border research cooperation in technology enhanced learning (TEL) and to develop a strategy for educational business promotion service. The Project combines three kinds of TEL in a complementary way:

1) *E-learning – mainly computer and/or internet-based learning.*

2) *T-learning: TV based learning.*

3) *M-learning: learning with a use of mobile devices; to produce an effective and innovative cross-media learning delivery system (eBig3) that goes beyond traditional web-based learning approaches.*

This is an innovative project of open and distance learning. The developed solutions includes integration of technical issues for cross-media learning content delivery, refinement of pedagogic considerations, development of shared understanding of target users learning contexts in border areas, production of learning content and organizing course pilots. This is a unique way to promote reintegrating young people into the labour market and education too.



Figure 2. Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border project eBig3

III. RESULTS

We participated in 2013 in the examination of 1st year students of program "Telecommunications (Distance Learning e-course) of Riga Technical University (RTU).

During the exam, the author conducted a survey, asking 107 students to fill in a questionnaire - Assessment of the effectiveness of the learning methods practiced on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 10 (the highest), and a short commentary. Table 1 of this study shows the students' evaluation of the efficiency of the learning form used in this course which reflects students' support for both traditional forms - learning and e-learning.

Respondents very carefully evaluated both the negative and the positive aspects of both methods based on their personal experience, and were able to provide an objective feedback in regards to what situations required a direct contact with teacher, and when e-learning was the best and most efficient learning option. That is reflected in the questionnaires that were submitted at the end of semester:

"E-learning is not a substitute for the traditional learning methods at the moment, but it can be a good additional tool for learning."

"E-learning is very useful when one needs to obtain lecture files and other study materials, and it's especially great for those who cannot attend lectures because of work or other commitments."

"I find E-learning very convenient because of its reduced costs and innovative learning environment. Nevertheless, it is also important to keep the traditional aspects of learning as a part of it in order to maintain the diversity of the course".

"Traditional forms of studies are definitely very important, because the presence of a teacher can contribute to a better understanding of the subject."

"E-learning should be available for all the subjects, because it is very convenient."

Respondents indicate that e-learning and traditional forms of study need to be kept in balance, because e-learning provides a great advantage to learn anywhere, anytime. A successful guidance through the study process, however, is just as important, and can only be ensured when a teacher is present. Respondents were also asked to state the core competences of the teacher:

1) responsive, intelligent, able to establish a good contact with students; sociable, friendly yet demanding when it comes to the quality of students' performance; understanding, able to listen and motivate their students;

2) possesses the ability to initiate discussions, to prepare a training plan, has a comprehensive understanding of different study subjects, ability to keep students motivated and interested in the particular subject of study;

TABLE I STUDENTS EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FORM

Form of study	Low rating			Average rating				High rating		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lectures				3	6	16	34	29	11	6
Discussions			2	3	5	13	18	35	21	8
Assignment preparation and insertion in ORTUS system*			1		7	11	19	35	15	17
Teachers' comments in ORTUS system			1	2	7	12	15	33	17	18
e-portfolio utility	9	5	6	3	10	16	26	16	10	4

* RTU portal «ORTUS» (www.ortus.lv), which provides e-learning environment

According to the students, just as important as experience in their field and professionalism, are positive traits of character, suggesting the need to develop a positive communication between the students and the teacher.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

1. Being NEET is not only a personal problem for those affected, but constitutes a challenge to society as a whole. This is very important given the size of the NEET population today, which may seriously undermine the sustainability and stability of the societies concerned. Governments have been very active in promoting policies for re-engaging young people in the labour market and the education system.

2. In addition to increasing access to education, greater use of new technologies and open educational resources can also help reduce the costs of educational institutions and students, particularly for disadvantaged groups, including existing and potential NEET group of people.

3. Educational institutions should combine the traditional forms of study and e-learning, as e-learning provides the opportunity to learn anywhere, anytime. However, a direct contact between the teacher and the student plays a very important role in acquiring a quality education, and should by no means be left out.

4. Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border project eBig3 is a unique way to promote reintegration of young people into the labour market and education. It is therefore necessary to develop distance learning courses by taking into account the needs of NEETs and thus ensure their integration into society. Social network microblog Twitter could become a successful digital media tool to involve NEETs in distance learning by using appropriate pedagogical and

psychological methods of motivation.

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