

**UDC 378.091.59:342.7**

## **STUDENT SELF-GOVERNANCE AS A WAY OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Abstract.** The article outlooks the issue of empowering in education through organizing student self-governance. The relevance of the research is proved by “European Convention on Human Rights” that was adopted by Council of Europe in 1994 and supported by Ukrainian government. Some changes have been made in the sphere of education, student self-governance is considered to protect students’ rights and interests and involve them into the management of educational institution.

The analysis of scientific works of the domestic and foreign is presented in the article. The conceptual framework of the paper comprises the works by P. Freire, P. Hodgkinson, T. Lawson, and J. Walker. The Ukrainian scientists I. Anosov, V. Demchuk, H. Harbuzova, Yu. Krashchenko, V. Prykhodko, V. Solovei, L. Sheina, L. Shyhapova, L. Vozniak pay special attention to different aspects of implementing self-governance in educational institutions. The purpose of the paper is to describe the student self-governance as a way of empowerment of human rights in education. It is defined that the foundations of the empowerment in education are revealed in the work of P. Freire where he stresses that students need to be actively involved in that learning and governing in order to have emancipatory effects. The concept of empowerment in education was first defined in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by foreign scientists in the sphere of sociology and psychology (I. Cunningham, J. Hyman, and C. Baldry) who assert that empowerment means keeping control over different aspects of educational process and being responsible for quality of knowledge and skills gained. The authors emphasize that some aspects of empowerment correlates with the functions of student self-governing at educational institutions. Based on V. M. Pevsner’s research on the pedagogical potential of student self-governance, three main criteria for empowerment are singled out. It is concluded that the empowerment in education through implementing self-governance can help people understand the different beliefs, attitudes and values, as well as the glaring contradictions of today’s multicultural society in which they live.

**Key words:** empowerment; student self-governance; human rights in education.

**Introduction.** Human rights have become a fundamental concept in modern education system. Education and training should be focused on the respect for these rights and freedoms. Human rights in education are the main concern that is described

in “European Convention on Human Rights” (1994), adopted by Council of Europe, which has become the guidance for Ukrainian government in making the recommendations on developing the role of human rights in university education and professional training (2004). So, human rights in education is the justified political requirement. Moreover, since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2019 the Ukrainian government adopted an order about the position of educational ombudsman who protects the rights of secondary school students, university students, teachers and scientists. This shows how crucial the issue of empowerment in education is.

Since a long time ago, a great and diverse activities has been done in the sphere of higher education. There are many ways to implement human rights into the education because people see the world differently, teachers work in different conditions and people’s awareness of their rights is different. However, the generally accepted facts regarding human rights in education are those that everyone has the right to education and education should aim at the full development of personality and at increasing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Education should promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all peoples, racial and religious groups. And education institution discipline must be maintained through methods that reflect respect for the human dignity of a personality. In general, education should be directed to the development of the students’ personality, talents and abilities, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, prepare a student for a conscious life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality, and respect for the natural environment. The main objective of the educational institutions is to find the ways of empowering the students’ rights. Student self-governance is considered to be the way of the empowerment of a person (student). It is an integral part of public self-governance, providing protection of the rights and interests of persons studying at higher education institution, and their participation in the management of educational institution.

**Analysis of publication.** The founder of human rights theory in education is believed to be Paulo Freire who is an author of the book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1968). In this book he describes a method of getting aware of the reality that is based on interaction of people. P. Freire is sure that true education should encourage freedom. This book also emphasizes the interrelation between education and politics. The work of T. Lawson (2011) looks into the issue of “empowerment in education: liberation, management or distraction?”, where the idea of student self-governance as a method of empowerment, a way of disciplining modern citizens in the mode of self-observation can be found. The purpose of empowerment lies in the development and promotion of a way of learning that focuses on one of the following task: enhancing “critical education” that will contribute to developing a phalanx of citizens, aware of the

contextuality of their own experience and who acquire dominion over yourself and over your life.

The appeal of the concept of empowerment can be seen at the different levels in which it is meant to advocate the introduction of autonomy and choice. P. Hodkinson (1989) argues that empowerment involves the change of educational structures to expand the choice offered to students – for example, by increasing the number of courses available to them. He recognizes also that the development of personal effectiveness takes place within the context of the communities that people inhabit – for example, through work experience programs. J. Walker (1988) asserted empowerment is about giving to students “choice among options” of how to live their lives in the most fulfilling and socially responsible way. This necessitates a giving-up of power by the teacher and handing over responsibility for their own learning to students. As P. Freire (1972) argued, the transfer of the teacher’s knowledge to the student is not of itself empowering, even where that knowledge may be emancipatory, but students need to be actively involved in that learning and governing in order to have emancipatory effects. These works comprise the conceptual framework for studying the ways of empowerment in education. Of special interest for our paper is the works by T. Lawson (2011), who emphasizes that the true empowerment can be achieved through the collaboration between teachers and students, but not through imposing knowledge and control.

In Ukraine the issue of organizing and functioning of student self-governance is presented in scientific papers in the context of developing a student personality (I. Anosov, V. Demchuk, V. Prykhodko, V. Solovei, L. Sheina et. al.); students’ leadership (Yu. Krashchenko, L. Shyhapova et. al.); improving the quality of future specialists’ training (L. Vozniak, H. Harbuzova et. al.). The issue of protecting human rights in education is studied by N. Petretska, but her main concern is legal aspects. So, the analysis of the scientific literature has proved that student self-governance hasn’t been considered as a way of empowerment before.

**The purpose of the article is** to describe the student self-governance as a way of empowerment of human rights in education.

**The research methods,** involved for achieving the purpose of the article, are the following: *analysis* and *generalization* of the information, presented in scientific literature, for investigating the ways of empowerment of human rights in education; systematization of scientific findings of foreign researchers for describing student self-governance as a way of empowerment the human rights in higher education institutions.

**Research results.** Human lives in the world where everything is interconnected; human rights education necessarily includes a holistic, that is, comprehensive approach

to learning. The comprehensive approach to learning contributes to the development of the personality as a whole – its intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potential. Comprehensive learning also assumes that learning takes place in a social context that encompasses all everyday experiences. Therefore, it provides interdisciplinary and cross-cutting links between traditional courses of the curriculum.

In higher education, the empowerment has general meaning – the transfer of decision-making to “customers” in the educational relationship; that is, there is an implicit bias, power from government to teacher and from teacher to student, and potential equalizing the power differences between them.

Analysing the work of the famous educator P. Freire “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1968), his approach and the principle of pedagogy are disclosed, focused on new relations of teacher, student and society. In this book, the author calls traditional pedagogy “banking”, where the student is “an empty vessel filled with knowledge, like a piggy Bank”. Freire also insists that the disciple can play an important role in the co-creation of students’ knowledge. P. Freire’s theory continues to push scientists to consider all the variety of personal and geographical nuances that need to be taken into account when talking about education. P. Freire encourages us to look at everything critically, especially working together with others in the context of the community. His theory also contributes to assess the research in the realm of everyday life – everyday realities, the real fates of people’s real lives, their struggles and their expectations – in order to make research accessible to the people.

“Pedagogy of the Oppressed” was written mainly not to suggest a new methodology (which would contradict the author’s criticism of stereotypical models of education), but to stimulate the development of a liberating educational process that challenges students, calls them to action and requires the development of critical thinking about how to change the world where they live, assessing it thoughtfully and critically. So, they can identify and confront the differences and contradictions, being inherent in the relationship between oppressors and oppressed. The author encourages teachers to develop critical thinking skills that do not allow students to forget dangerous memories, marked by the stigma of appalling economic inequality, brutal violence and dehumanization, which must be condemned.

It is not surprising that the “banking” concept of education regards a person as a manageable and adaptable human being. The more students are engaged in collecting the contributions passed on to them, the less they develop the critical thinking that arises if they interact with the world as converters and creators. The more deeply they perceive the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend to simply adapt to the world as it is and to fragmentarily view the reality that is taught to them.

The author, by a vivid example of his experience, emphasizes some aspects of the pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy that should be developed “together” and not “for” those who are oppressed (whether individuals or nations) in the continuous struggle to regain their human essence. This pedagogy makes oppression and it encourages to reflect the objects and based on this reflection the necessary degree of involvement in the struggle for liberation is born. And in this struggle, educators themselves are developed and re-developed.

P. Freire’s work has made us think about the empowerment in education in order to preserve students’ freedom, to motivate them for study, as well to develop their critical thinking skills. The concept “empowerment” in the sphere of education was introduced by I. Cunningham, J. Hyman, and C. Baldry (1996) and was defined as a strategy of a personality for keeping the control over different aspects of his or her life. P. Short, J. Greer and W. Melvin stresses that empowerment is a process which encourage students to enhance their competence to be responsible for their growth and to solve their problems. In current conditions the organisation of student self-governance has almost the same functions as presented in Short’s definition. According to the definition of S. Khusainova and E. Levina (2016), the student self-governance is students’ social and psychological characteristics that identify the changes in the educational process, focused on achieving new learning outcomes of better quality.

So, let’s consider student self-governance in Ukraine as a way of empowerment. The process of reforming higher education in Ukraine, the democratization of society, as well as integration into the world educational systems place great demands on the education and training of every student. The student youth have an urgent purpose to get the necessary knowledge for being a competitive person in today’s market economy, as well as for acquiring certain leadership skills, for learning how to make independent decisions, and for being responsible for them. An important fact is that students are informed of their rights and opportunities in the field of education.

Exploring the pedagogical potential of student self-governance, V. M. Pevzner (2005) identifies three important criteria:

1) successful implementation of the educational functions of student organizations related to social, vocational and personal education;

2) implementation of educational functions of student self-governance, the associated use of self-management as a resource of self-organization of students’ academic activity;

3) effective implementation of the developmental functions of student self-governance, which ensures the development of students’ organizational, communicative and creative abilities.

Along with the fact that student self-governance is a component of the educational system of the university, it is also a special form of students' initiative, independent, and socially useful activities to address to various issues of student youth:

- the organization of education, life, leisure, development of students' social activity and support socially acceptable initiatives;
- student self-governance is a form of independent social activity for implementing the functions of managing the students' life;
- the ideas about the main priority of student self-governance organizational activities in the learning environment and protection of students' interests and rights, the development of a competitive specialist are especially crucial;
- as an integral system, student self-governance reflects various organizational forms that ensure participation in the management of student groups.

There is a strong belief that student self-governance makes optimal conditions for every student to realize his or her role in managing social and educational processes, increases the level of their responsibility for the education quality, allows them to master practical skills in the system of social interaction both at the micro level of the university and at the macro level of socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural relations. At the same time, the transformation of students into social partners of the university administration and teaching staff opens access to the disclosure of the social potential of young people, as well as it promotes the education of self-organized responsible citizens with sustainable value orientations.

Now, we can conclude that the system of student self-governance creates favorable opportunities for the development of axiological potential of students, because it solves the following tasks:

- realization of intrinsic forces of the students, their needs, abilities and interests in various fields and forms of social activities;
- deeper understanding of their rights and possibilities in education;
- raising awareness of students and their demands to the level of their knowledge, skills and abilities;
- raise patriotic attitude to the spirit and traditions of the university;
- assistance in the implementation of socially significant youth initiatives;
- involvement of students in the formation of public opinion about the student youth as a real force and a strategic resource for the development of the society.

The initiative of young people, their involvement and interest to understand about their rights in education are important for developing the higher education quality.

The role of youth, youth organizations and youth policy in the realization of the right to human rights can be focused on the following:

- empowering young people to fully enjoy human rights and human dignity and to engage them in work in this field;
- promoting the active participation of young people in democratic processes and structures;
- creating equal opportunities for young people to participate in all aspects of daily life;
- guaranteeing gender equality and prevent all forms of violence against women;
- involving young people in environmental protection and creating prerequisites for sustainable development and education in this area;
- facilitating access to information and counselling services for youth.

**Conclusions.** Therefore, it can be concluded that student self-governance in its various manifestations has a significant pedagogical influence on the student youth. The spectrum of such influence goes far beyond the basic educational process and is not limited to ensuring high quality of professional training of future specialists. Student self-governance, first of all, is aimed at the implementation of the students' essential power, their needs, abilities and interests in various spheres and forms of social activities, including education. In other words, the main content of the student self-governance is to ensure that students get the experience of self-organization of their lives.

These circumstances allow us to speak about the orientation of student self-governance on the development of students stable hierarchy of value orientations that determine the nature of their social activities. Student self-governance has a value-oriented function, which provides a philosophical understanding of students' social and professional activities, their relations with other people.

Speaking about the concept of P. Freire in the context of empowerment, namely: the "banking" concept (with its tendency to divide everything into parts) distinguishes two stages in the actions of the teacher. During the first one, when a teacher is getting ready for lectures in his office or laboratory, he or she studies the object of knowledge. During the second stage or she, he gives the students information about this object. Students are offered not to understand the subject, but to remember the content told by the teacher. Students do not perform an act of knowledge, as it is the property of the teacher, and not the object mediating knowledge and awakens to critical analysis of the teacher and students. Thus, under the guise of "preserving culture and knowledge" we have a system that does not contribute to the attainment of either genuine knowledge or genuine culture.

So, expanding young people's human rights is beneficial not only to society, but also to young people themselves. In today's society, young people are increasingly

faced with social exclusion, religious, ethnic and national differences, as well as the disadvantages and advantages of globalization. By addressing these issues, the empowerment in education through implementing self-governance can help people understand the different beliefs, attitudes and values, as well as the glaring contradictions of today's multicultural society in which they live.

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### СТУДЕНТСЬКЕ САМОВРЯДУВАННЯ ЯК ШЛЯХ ДО РОЗШИРЕННЯ ПРАВ ЛЮДИНИ В СИСТЕМІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

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**Анотація.** У статті розглянуть проблему розширення прав студентів через організацію діяльності органів самоуправління в закладах вищої освіти. Підтвердження актуальності

порушеної проблеми викладено в низці документів Ради Європи та уряду України. Концептуальним підґрунтям дослідження стали праці зарубіжних учених, зокрема П. Фрейре, П. Годкінсона, Т. Лаусона, Дж. Волкера та інших. Серед українських науковців І. Аносов, В. Демчук, Г. Гарбузова, Ю. Кравченко, В. Приходько присвятили свої дослідження вивченню різних аспектів діяльності органів самоуправління в закладах освіти. З'ясовано, що в питаннях щодо розширення прав людини в освіті науковці в світовому масштабі завжди звертаються до праць П. Фрейре, в яких він наголошував на необхідності залучення студентів до активної участі в освітньому процесі та до керування ним, що має емансипаційний ефект. Встановлено, що до широкого вжитку поняття розширення прав особистості увійшло наприкінці 20-го століття й сутність його полягала у встановленні контролю над різними аспектами соціального життя та несення відповідальності за них, що тісно корелює з функціями органів студентського самоуправління. На основі вивчення наукових праць В. Пельзнера, визначено критерії розширення прав студентів із урахуванням потенціалу студентського самоврядування.

**Ключові слова:** розширення прав людини; студентське самоуправління; права людини в освіті.

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Матеріали надійшли до редакції 24.03.2020 р.