

# The Ecosystem Of The Citizenship Education Concept For Building Civic Competence

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## Abstract

Civic education is one of the preconditions for young people's civic engagement, which in turn contributes to the long-term development of civil society. The skilful and interdisciplinary integration of civic education into the curriculum and school life, as well as professional and pedagogical implementation of it, on the basis of the fundamental values of democracy, helps to promote students' civic engagement and responsibility for themselves, their fellows and the environment at local, national and international level. As a result, civically competent young people shape the future growth and development of society, the state and the nation. The aim of this publication is to highlight the importance of citizenship education and, basing on the theoretical research carried out, to develop a conceptual framework for citizenship education.

**Key words:** civic education, civic competence, civil society, school, student, teacher.

## 1. Introduction

Successful integration of young people's into the society and the realisation of their life goals are closely linked to access to education. If society is to become more open to change and to overcoming challenges, a high level of civic education must become a desirable learning outcome. Civic education is an important part of Europe's economic and social development and features prominently in the debate on the development of a knowledge-based society in Europe. Civic education plays a crucial role in

promoting civil society (Woolard, 2017), building a geopolitical environment, and fostering democracy and civic engagement at local, regional, national and international levels (Strandbrink, 2017). Historically, one of the primary goals of education has been preparing people to democratic participation (Nash, 2003).

Citizenship education in schools builds social capital (Heggart, 2015), fosters democratic capacity (Martens, Gainous, 2012),

promotes collective action (Kanter, Schneider, 2013), prepares students for life in multicultural democratic society (Macedo, 2003), builds tolerant attitudes of students within existing pluralism (Wolf, Macedo, 2004) as well as promotes understanding democratic values (Kuran, 2014), leading to the development of students' civic competence and civic agency. Thus, the civic education of the new generation acquires a special relevance and importance in the comprehensive school, where learning is the key to the quality of life, which also raises the individual's interest in life. We live in a very indefinite era, where people seem to be confused – Homo Confusus, thus, understanding and approaching democratic values and the reasons for their relevance, as well as a development of individual's civic position and civil society becomes essential. Successfully implemented civic education results in the increase of individual and collective responsibility (Jurs, 2018) and the promotion of a knowledge society, while a knowledge society is a system of human social relations that ensures a high degree of innovation and in which each individual is able to achieve a high degree of participation by independently acquiring, using and creating new knowledge (Kože, Muraškovska, 2007).

In the complex and multifaceted pedagogical process, the implementation of civic education cannot be separated from the existing changing reality and the overall curriculum, as the learning process reflects the values and needs of society. In order to better target civic education, it is recommended to orient its content towards the development of specific civic competences in general education institutions, using diverse pedagogical methods and the most effective teaching and learning strategies, which are derived from the professional competence of the teacher, the school's readiness to promote civic engagement of young people, the implemented educational content and education in family (Jurs, Samuseviča, 2020). Being aware of the relevance of civic education and the very wide

scope for interpretation of the content framework of civic education, the aim of the publication is to highlight the importance of citizenship education and, based on the theoretical research carried out, to develop a conceptual framework for the content of citizenship education that can help in the future pedagogical process for the effective implementation of citizenship education in schools. The resulting research on the historical transformation of the concept of civic education and the elaboration of a content concept of civic education are of high practical value and will enable teachers to effectively implement civic education in the future. Further theoretical and empirical research can be carried out on the basis of the developed conceptual framework for civic education in order to identify the most effective teaching and learning strategies.

In order to achieve the authors' objective, the theoretical research methods, such as axiomatic and descriptive methods, have been used.

## **2. Theoretical research findings: the relevance and importance of civic education for the sustainability of society**

The quality of the content and delivery of civic education has a direct impact on the quality of life of every person and society. Personal qualities such as self-confidence, the ability to influence one's own destiny, social and civic competence, a sense of duty, altruism and empathy are as important as cognitive abilities. It is the development of the personal qualities mentioned above that is crucial for the pedagogical process of civic competence in a comprehensive school. Thus, civic education can contribute to the formation of creative, multifaceted, civically active, state-minded, intelligent, capable, knowledgeable, competitive and tolerant personality, which is an integral guarantee of the long-term development of the country – educational activity is a systemic human activity, the main task of which is human consciousness (Brock, 2000). However, it should be noted that the

implementers of civic education are first and foremost educators, and therefore the learning of civic education is primarily based on the knowledge of the educational content, the knowledge of the educator and the beliefs of the educator (Torney-Purta et al., 2005). Educators' professional competence consists of knowledge, skills and beliefs that result in action, while teachers' actions influence students' actions, which in turn underpin their future competence (Namsone, Volkinšteinė, Lāce, 2018).

Civic education is a pathway to a thriving democracy, preparing citizens for permanent and responsible action in public life (Longo, 2007), but at the same time it should be noted that civic education is taught in a fragmented way (Nogueira, Moreira, 2012). Civic education is often implemented in isolation from social reality, it is not oriented towards the development of civic engagement skills (Downs, 2012), as to some extent civic education is limited to the acquisition of academic knowledge (Jagdish, 2014). The concept of citizenship education consists of both knowledge about oneself, others, rights and responsibilities, and the application of knowledge in concrete action, which is oriented towards civically responsible action through co-responsibility. Civic education should provide students with practical experiences through participation in school and wider community activities aimed at preparing them for their role as citizens in a democratic state, thereby bridging the gap between the individual and society (European Commission, 2017). Civic education builds a value system and contributes to students' civic responsibility by understanding the causal links and interactions between socio-economic and political processes, so that students become civically competent, loyal citizens of the country and empowered contributors to civil society.

Civic education can promote civic competence, strengthen democratic traditions, build a shared understanding of national values, encourage citizens to become more actively

involved in strengthening society, and contribute to the development of a socially responsible economy. Young people around the world have a crucial role to play in social change – not only in the future (as adults), but immediately as active citizens today. Civic education provides the necessary knowledge and skills to promote youth effectiveness, making an invaluable contribution to building civil society, while emphasising that a civic education approach must provide young people with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in public life (Shaw et al., 2012) and build their citizenship on democratic values. Civic education serves as a prerequisite for fostering the development of students' civic competence in the pedagogical process. Civic education is a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation that allows to contribute to the quality of life in society, while at the centre of civic education is the morally and civically responsible citizen (Ehrlich, 2000).

### **3. Theoretical research results: historical transformation and interpretations of the concept of civic education from 1997 to 2022**

The theory of civic competence includes three interrelated components of civic education: (I) civic competence (developed decision-making skills, comparative and international analysis of government and citizenship, developed civic engagement skills, and civic virtues that focus on cooperation); (II) civic knowledge (systematic learning of key concepts, use of case studies); (III) civic virtues – use of literature and experience.

Civic education consists of fundamental ideas and knowledge that young people need to know and apply in order to become active and responsible citizens of a democracy. Civic knowledge includes an understanding of democracy, certain actions and behaviours in the conditions democracy (Patrick, 1997, 3). Civic education can also be linked to the promotion of an understanding of democratic

ideals, a commitment to democratic values and principles based on knowledge, civic engagement skills and civically responsible attitudes that constitute active citizenship:

- knowledge, including the five questions (What is the meaning of public life, politics and government? What are the foundations of the political system? How does the government implement the purpose, values and democratic principles of the constitution? What is the relationship of the people of a country to other nations in the world? What is the role of citizens in a country's democracy?);
- intellectual and participatory skills, using critical thinking, analysis and synthesis of information, and the ability to discern and explain processes as a whole;
- a civic position between the private and public sectors, where the individual becomes an independent member of society, accepting political and economic responsibilities, respecting individual values and human dignity, participating effectively and thoughtfully in civic life, promoting constitutional democracy (Branson, Quigley, 1998, 12).

A similar approach to explaining civic education is described by legal expert D. Grossman, who highlights four interrelated dimensions of the civic education model: 'individual capacity, commitment to seeing oneself as a member of a community at local, regional, national and international levels, capacity to apply change to the past, to contribute to the future, capacity to live and work together for the civic good' (Grossman, 2000, 81).

The authors of the international study 'Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries. Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen, 2001' mention the link

between the content of civic education and existing challenges in society as one possible approach to explaining the challenges of civic education, emphasizing that civic education should build young people's knowledge and value orientation on the basis of eight key principles, which include a certain way of thinking, common goals and objectives of society: values of social participation; religious values; socio-economic values; political processes and their values; economic processes and their values; educational and communication values; heroes, symbols in local and national self-government; allies and enemies - foreign policy of the state (Torney-Purta et al. , 2001, 20).

International education expert L. Quisumbing describes civic education in terms of a holistic social approach (individual level - family - local community - national level - regional level - global level), as a multidimensional content consisting of: civic education - knowledge-based civic beliefs and civic skills; values education - developing one's position in civic attitudes and beliefs; environmental education - promoting understanding, skills and values according to the concept of sustainability (Quisumbing, 2002, 4).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization report 'Teachers, Students and Tertiary Level Instructors, 2002' stresses that citizenship education as a holistic approach to learning and teaching acquires in four levels:

- conceptual level: knowledge about self, others, behaviour, culture, history, country, etc;
- the active level: skills in decision-making, effective communication, active non-violence,
- understanding of self and others, concepts, motives, key issues and processes;

- evaluation and reflection on experience: acceptance, respect, valuing of self and others (UNESCO, 2002, 22).

J. Patrick emphasizes that `civic knowledge, cognitive civic skills, civic engagement skills and civic position are four fundamental components of citizenship education` (Patrick, 2004, 42), which in synergy with each other determine the subsequent process of the development of an individual's civic competence. While educational researchers T. Vontz and R. Leming, basing on the work of J. Patrick, have developed a content framework for civic education, which aims to develop students' civic competence (quoted from Vontz & Leming, 2004, 90-92):

- civic knowledge: the context of democracy and citizenship; civil society; constitutionalism; the functions of democratic institutions; historical understanding and competence; the history of democracy and participation; the market economy; citizens' responsibility; citizens' rights and duties; forms of public law.
- cognitive citizenship skills: analysis, synthesis and explanation of political and social life; evaluation, definition and positioning of social norms; identification and characterisation of political and social life; interpretation of political communications; critical and constructive thinking.
- civic engagement skills: debating public issues; evaluating the implementation of policy planning documents; ascertaining the impact of policy decisions; interplay between common and individual interests; monitoring public participation; engagement in improving civic life.
- civic position: acceptance of equal and humane principles; respect for people; affirmation of the moral character of citizens; responsibility for civic participation in public life; participation in local government; acceptance, respect and defence of everyone's rights; support for civic initiatives.

The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency report "Citizenship Education in Europe, 2012" highlights the components of citizenship education:

- political awareness (knowledge of key facts and key concepts);
- developing critical thinking and analytical skills;
- fostering responsible citizenship (respect, tolerance, solidarity, etc.);
- promoting young people's active civic engagement in school and community life (Eurydice, 2012, 97).

The aims of citizenship education are classified as:

- the concept of teaching: the morality and ethics of the individual: the result of this is a cooperative, honest, polite and emotionally intelligent student;
- knowledge and skills development: the set of knowledge, skills and abilities needed to help an individual achieve desired goals, including knowledge of social, economic, political, cultural and religious issues;
- tolerance and respect for different cultures, religions and ethnic groups, so that students can better understand globalisation trends and promote democratic values and peace in different environments;
- rights and values: to achieve their life goals and tasks, students need to understand their rights,

- responsibilities and democratic values;
- legitimacy of decisions - when individuals exercise themselves in social, political, economic, cultural and religious spheres, there must be a clear understanding of the legitimacy of decisions and actions taken, in accordance with the preconditions of democracy;
  - participation: civic engagement as the capacity of students to take part in social, political, cultural and economic functions;
  - recognition of rights and responsibilities - recognition of rights and responsibilities enables students to make a meaningful contribution to improving the quality of life, leading to becoming responsible and productive members of society and citizens (Levinson, 2014).

The European Commission's 2017 report 'Citizenship Education at School in Europe' highlights that "Citizenship education aims to foster knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote (I) effective and constructive interaction with other people; (II) critical thinking; (III) socially responsible action; (IV) democratic action" (European Commission, 2017, 25).

Citizenship education training has four interrelated components:

- civic knowledge - understanding the structure of government, decision-making, executive, judiciary and media; knowledge of socio-economic issues; and knowledge of national politics and history in a global context;
- civic skills - the ability to exercise your rights as a citizen, research and critical thinking skills, and the ability

to participate in decision-making processes;

- civic behaviour: responsible attitudes, a sense of civic duty, concern for the well-being of others and trust in legitimate authority;
- civic capacities: civic agency, access to networks, opportunities for participation, and other forms of social capital that promote civic engagement (Vinnakota, 2019, 8).

The shift from civic education to civic learning implies a conceptual change in the pedagogical paradigm, where the learner is a proactive participant in the teaching and learning process. The civic learning ecosystem highlights the necessity of the continuous development of civic competences: (I) at school through a regulated curriculum; (II) in the family and in the surrounding community; (III) outside school through non-formal learning opportunities and the benefits of the non-governmental sector; (IV) in the digital environment; (V) in professional and higher education institutions (Vinnakota, 2019, 13-14).

Civic education builds citizens' knowledge and skills to participate fully in democracy; in a broader context, the components of civic education are: (I) knowledge and skills: understanding the basic principles of democracy, political ideology and citizens' constitutional rights; (II) civic values: freedom of expression, cooperation, respectful relationships; (III) civic behaviour: participation in non-governmental organisations, participation in elections, volunteering, engagement with local communities (Winthrop, 2020). Civic education as a transformative education (Hoggan-Kloubert & Mabrey, 2022) is crucial to strengthening European democracy in the knowledge of the geopolitical crisis

#### 4. The result - conceptual framework for civic education

Basing on the theoretical research carried out and focusing on the different explanations and interpretations of the concept of civic education in the period 1997-2020, the aim of civic education is to promote civic engagement and responsibility of students for themselves, their fellows and the environment at local, national and international levels, on the basis of the fundamental values of democracy. For further discussion and research, the authors propose the following three-dimensional concept of citizenship education and its visualisation (see Table 1).

Dimensions of civic education and their characteristics:

- (I) knowledge and understanding dimension - rights and duties of the citizen; constitutional rights; basic principles and nature of democracy; opportunities for civic engagement; public life and civil society; political system; culture and history of the

country; pillars of power (decision-making, executive, judiciary and media).

- (II) skills and capacities dimension: preparing, taking and implementing decisions; reconciling different and divergent interests; cooperation, communication and conflict resolution; civic engagement (social, political, economic and cultural participation); critical thinking; argumentation; volunteering; civic agency.
- (III) attitudes and civic position dimension: responsibility and sense of civic duty; willingness to subordinate one's own needs to the common good; democratic belief and value system; acceptance of self and others; support for civic initiatives; dedication and solidarity; respect and tolerance; concern for the well-being of others.

Table 1. Conceptual framework for civic education: a 3-dimensional concept

The aim of civic education – based on the fundamental values of democracy, in order to promote students' civic engagement and responsibility for themselves, their peers and the environment at local, national and international levels.	
Knowledge and understanding dimension	Rights and duties as a citizen
	Constitutional rights
	The basic principles and nature of democracy
	Opportunities for civic engagement
	Public life and civil society
	Political system
	National culture and history
	Pillars of power (decision-making, executive, judiciary and media)
Skills and capabilities dimension	Preparation, preparation and implementation of decisions
	Reconciling different and divergent interests
	Cooperation, communication and conflict resolution
	Civic engagement (social, political, economic and cultural participation)
	Critical thinking
	Stating own position
	Volunteering

Attitudes and citizenship dimension	Responsibility and sense of civic duty
	Willingness to subordinate your needs to the common good
	democratic beliefs and values
	Acceptance of oneself and others
	Support for civic initiatives
	Commitment and solidarity
	Respect and tolerance
Caring for the well-being of others	

The proposed three-dimensional concept of the implementation of the content of civic education is an attempt to explain and theorise the multifaceted nature of citizenship in a broader context. Civic education thus serves as one of the preconditions for the sustainable development of civil society and the proactive civic engagement of young people. The developed content concept of civic education will help pedagogical processes to develop the most effective teaching and learning strategies for further developing students' civic competence.

## 5. Conclusions

System applicational identified and determinately carried out civic learning and education essentially influence the development of youth's civic competences. As a result of it is a development of civic responsibility and there is an effect on their civic engagement. Civic education promotes the development of civic responsible attitude, which is manifested as individual civic position. To carry out civic education aims, for instance, to be civically active member of public, who can contribute to solving existing problem, a person, using various methods, moves on personal growth. As a result, self-regulation element becomes an important precondition in the process of development of active civic position. Students understand and become aware of their individual, social and emotional needs, as well as desires.

Implementation of civic education can be ensured through the achievement of the

aim of civic education conception, which is formed from knowledge and at the same time attitude towards oneself, people around you, rights and duties, your country and its traditions, as well as the usage of knowledge in a certain situation, which is based on civic responsible behaviour, taking co-responsibility. Implementation of civic upbringing tasks in civic education conception include: development of students' civic consciousness (understanding about their rights and duties, understanding of democratic values, knowledge about the culture historical traditions of their city, region and country; development of civic emotions and qualities (patriotism, loyalty, internationalism, tolerance, sense of civic duties and social responsibility, readiness to protect the motherland and support their point of view)); active engagement in social activities. Achievable aims in the context of upbringing and education are interlinked and subordinated.

Civic education cannot be interpreted only from the aspect of knowledge dimension because the knowledge itself cannot influence student's civic competence and it is not the only precondition of civically responsible behaviour. It is essential to promote certain student's civic active behaviour in pedagogical process. It can be achieved with intercession of civic education, supporting it with basic principles of civic education. Civic behaviour should be based on student's civic engagement legal capacity, taking civic responsibility for



oneself and others and behaving according to individual civic conviction and position.

Being aware of the content concept of civic education, its topicality and relevance, it is required to develop the most effective teaching and learning strategies in the pedagogical process for the further development of students' civic competence.

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