

**PILSONISKĀ LĪDZDALĪBA – IZGLĪTĪBAS SATURA
PILNVEIDEI
CIVIC PARTICIPATION – IMPROVEMENT OF THE
EDUCATIONAL CONTENT**

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Abstract. *This publication is focused on important components of civic education. During the reformation of the educational system these components are becoming important elements of the improvement of civic participation. By gathering the knowledge of various theoretical approaches the authors of the work discover the preconditions for the phenomena of the formation of civic participation and its importance in the pedagogical process of comprehensive schools. Although the question of civic society is internally complicated, the context of the Latvian political reality creates a need for a dimension of civic participation. Living in our rapidly changing time and knowing the importance of civic participation which depends on each individual, it is important to bring more attention on the improvement of civic education in comprehensive schools by enriching and structuring the educational content. As a result, the enriched educational content, containing strengthened aspects of civic participation next to a balanced learning of theoretical knowledge and practical competence, would promote the upbringing of a civically active, nationally thinking, competent person that is able to take responsibilities and that is crucial for the long term development of the country.*

Keywords: *civic education, civic participation, school, student, teacher, upbringing.*

Introduction

Ievads

Civic society is one of the most important prerequisites of modern democracy. The quality of democracy, the welfare of the state and the ability to fulfill the values and interests of a citizen depend on the development of the civic society. Democracy includes a specific way of thinking that doesn't appear out of nowhere. Instead, it has to be developed during the lifetime of every individual, especially during the formation of the personality in school. Because of that, the civic education of the new generation has gained importance in the context of reforming the education in secondary schools. Civic participation is the important prerequisite for the long term development of the society. It allows each

individual to be co-responsible for the surrounding processes and to be the proactive creator of social and political processes.

A competent and wise individual, able to take action and responsibility is the base for the development of the society. Education plays an important role in the creation of this complicated individual. Historically, one of the primary goals of education is preparing people for participation in democracy (Nash, 2003: 2). However, it is necessary to overview the educational potential of civic education in schools to carry out this idea in a pedagogical context. The educational content should be connected with the existing challenges in the society and focused towards preparing the students for civic activities by offering an approach balanced between theoretical and practical knowledge. Education should be linked with existing societal challenges and guided to preparing students for civic activities, thus providing a balanced approach between theory and practice. “Youth participation in the public activities at different levels: schools, local governments, state is an important part of the educational process. Initiative, acceptance of responsibility, the participation in group decision making, leadership nomination – they are essential skills and abilities of citizens for the democratic society. These skills and abilities are difficult to be acquired. There is one way – only through the practical action” (Koroļeva et al., 2005: 14–15). Civic participation can be contributed with enriched content and methodically improved provision of civic education in schools through interdisciplinary, practical, social activities and personal responsibility which is based on non-formal education approach. This raises the need for the content development of civic education based on the current issues of civic participation basis, thereby contributing to the long term growth of the country, focusing on young people’s citizenship, teaching them to take responsibility and initiative to actively participate in nation-building processes.

The aim of the publication is to describe the development of the concept of civic participation in democratic education and the development process of civic education in the content of educational reform context.

Prerequisites of civic participation ***Pilsoniskās līdzdalības priekšnosacījumi***

The active involvement of young people in the society with providing the necessary support e.g. practical benefits; emotional support; advice and respect shown in the long term can contribute to the personal growth and strengthen civic participation (Dolan, 2012: 358–359). The civic participation of young people, taking responsibility for the current socio-political processes can ensure the sustainability of community development. Definitely the promotion of civic participation meets the Latvian national interests, which only emphasizes the urgency of it, “the state must strengthen the quality of *information* and discussion *democracy* where community participation is widely provided in the

field of mutual communication and the ability to listen and communicate with its citizens and nationals living abroad, thus explaining decisions and promoting the unifying values and sense of purpose” (Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs, 2012: 48).

An opportunity to develop the values of life at school is necessary for a person to be civically active. These values trigger the desire to engage in social processes and provide the basis for active and constructive capacities. Thus, the obtained knowledge, practice, real social interaction, resulting attitudes and skills in the educational process earns the particular importance. The teacher’s personal example and professionalism provides personally significant emotional experience that is essential for the formation of motivation. Thus, the necessary educational information, masterfully using differentiated, interactive learning and problem-based methods have been provided as well as a social activity and cause-providing environment has been created.

The analysis of the explanation of the term civic participation reveals the diversity of theoretical approaches. Despite the multidimensionality of the phenomenon of civic participation, a person as an individual engaged in various social processes has been accented. For example, the explanation of the term civic participation provided by the American Psychological Association is based on the individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues that are related to a public concern. Civic engagement can occur in many forms – from individual voluntarism till organized participation in the elections. It may also include measures to solve directly problems of individuals or community through interaction with democratic institutions (Carpini). The proposed explanation of civic participation is focused on the current challenges society is facing, resulting from the individual’s active involvement.

Documents of policy planning of Latvia show civic participation as advocacy of interests and public participation in the local, national and European policy processes (Latvijas Republikas Kultūras ministrija, 2011: 6). However, civic participation cannot be limited into participation in the political process. Civic participation in the context of individual occurs at particular levels, starting with the individual and ending with the global aspect.

Gathering the knowledge of different theoretical approaches, the following conclusion can be drawn: civic participation is individual’s responsibility for the processes occurring in different areas of life. The manifestations and prerequisites of civic participation are determined by the upbringing, environment of the individual, available resources and gained experience. Civic participation should not be perceived as a one-sided process that relies only on government or municipal initiatives in the political aspects, or only participation in the organized elections or referendums. Civic participation is primarily their own individual contribution in the further development in a variety of forms and techniques. Civic participation, people’s attitude towards it, and the way of implementing it vary. A certain difference in the comprehension and form of the

civic participation is determined by several factors: upbringing, environment, resources, experience.

Upbringing has a very important role in the forming of the understanding of civic participation. It cannot be isolated from the state and its civic participation: “upbringing and its options is promoted or hindered directly by the administration of the state” (Špona, 2006: 9). However, the most important role of upbringing belongs to the family – the attitude towards civic participation is formed within the family where the attitude of parents is observed and later applied by the youngster and becomes a habit (World Bank, 2007: 166). The basic notions of life are formed within the family which gives the base for the growth of the personality. The orientation and understanding of values is directly formed by the family and that forms into the attitude and actions of an individual.

The educational system as the significantly part of environment has an important influence towards the promotion of civic participation. It can promote or hinder civic participation by affecting the motivation, understanding and attitude towards civic participation: “the new task for the system of education is to teach how to live in the reality of the nowadays world” (Alijevs, 2005: 79). The reflection of the educational system is the school, where youngsters spend a large part of their lives. School serves as the micro-model of the society – it promotes the mental and physical development of youth and offers a possibility to improve the skills of civic participation: “in order to develop the society in the long term, the formation of a new system is required. It has to support the civic participation, develop knowledge, skills and competence. The biggest role for teaching the skills of civic participation belongs to schools” (Borden, Perkins & Francisco, 2001: 50-52). Schools can promote the civic participation by carrying out civic education with the use of many sided pedagogical perspectives for the promotion of the social activity of the youngsters. It has to have an interdisciplinary approach, based on the methods of informal education.

The formation of youth civic participation *Jauniešu pilsoniskās līdzdalības veidošanās*

Being aware of the situation of the Latvian social situation the pedagogical process has to be many sided and interesting. It is not possible to teach a student to value and cherish the ideals of our nation and the legacy of our culture or to be co-responsible for the social processes around the student by offering typical, academic lesson and by teaching in a formal way applying the classical methods of teaching. All of this can be done with ordered and purposeful work. In civic education, most of the attention should be focused towards practical actions by involving the students in various social events to promote the skills of civic participation and the ability to take action and responsibility.

In primary school civic participation is partially promoted by “Social sciences” (Falka, 2007: 3), in which, civic participation gets only about 6% of the overall amount of lessons. Also, in the secondary school program civic education is promoted in the upbringing lessons and in “Politics and rights” class, (Falka, 2008: 5), in which civic participation related topics get 8% of the overall amount of lessons. This educational program is recommended, not obligatory, because of that, the teacher’s personal skills, knowledge and interest about civic participation is very important. It must be noted, that the UNESCO organizations recommend the participating countries to provide access to informal education and recognize civic participation as an important part of education (UNESCO, 2011: 2).

The availability of resources affects the benefits and the ability to act of an individual. Individual resources (human abilities e.g.), personal resources (money, time, health e.g.) and gained intellectual resources (skills, knowledge e.g.) allow the individual to fully participate in the surrounding social processes and participate in the activities of civic participation. These resources allow the individual to fully join in civic participation. In a positive manifestation of civic participation by using the available resources a youngster becomes a maker of the potentials and events in the society. Civic participation promotes the development of youngsters and insures that the youngster is not only an observer of the social processes but the maker of change (Sherrod, 2007: 63). Various individual experiences, gained throughout the lifetime which reflects into motivation dictates the further actions of the individual and the understanding of civic participation. If negative experiences have been stored throughout the lifetime, the civic participation of the individual is going to be low. The overall experience of the state must be noted when explaining the phenomena of civic participation in the context of pedagogical experiences.

There are various ways of characterizing the phenomena of civic participation for youngsters. In this publication the concept of civic participation is explained basing on the classification that is focused on the fact that human actions are oriented towards increasing the quality of life. (Figure 1). Civic participation is classified as: social participation; the participation of the society; individual participation (Brodie et al., 2011: 15).

A component of social participation can be recognized as the participation of a group or an individual in the solving of a social problem. The fact that people in Latvia do not participate in problem solving cannot be denied. Collective manifestations are a rare occasion in Latvia, the only successful case was in the times of the Latvian National Front, when civic participation as purposefully displayed. 250000 people participated to promote the overall democratization of the society, sovereignty of Latvia and the protection of the Latvian culture and language (Latvijas Republikas Saeimas Sabiedrisko attiecību birojs, 2013).

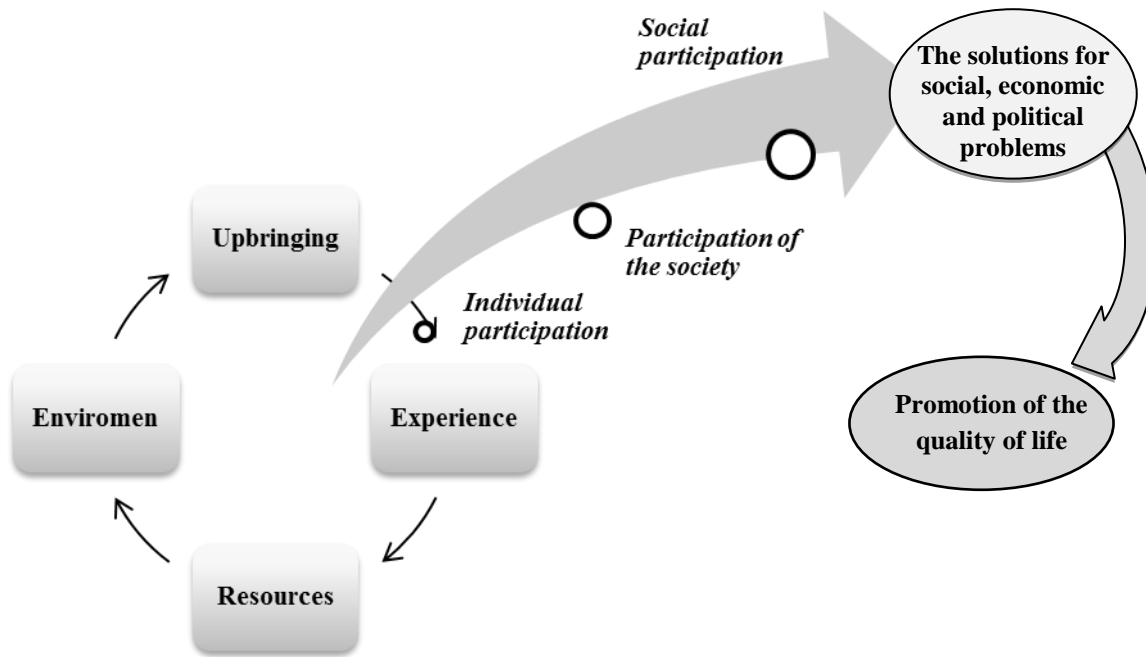


Figure 1 The formation of youth civic participation within youngsters.
 1.attēls. Jauniešu pilsoniskās līdzdalības veidošanās.

The optimization of general education curriculum of civic participation

Pilsoniskā līdzdalība izglītības satura optimizēšanā

Individual civic participation is difficult to be measured because it mostly depends on the individual, his decisions and actions which are the results of motivation, knowledge and the ability to act. At the same time, individual participation is the provenance for further civic participation. The phenomena of civic participation can be analyzed by basing on its perquisites, the level of participation and an approach, based on problem solving in which each individual or group can promote the quality of life through civic participation. In these relations the promotion of the quality of life serves as the most important motivation for action.

Therefore, the elements of civic engagement are targeted to be included in the curriculum. That would highlight the development of personal self-regulatory attitudes of each subject involved in the educational process. The competence of teachers in civic engagement and their personal interest in civic education is crucial in the pedagogical context for value actualization. Firstly, it is necessary to develop a single, theoretical and practical program of civic education for optimizing the general education curriculum of Latvia. That would be focused on each individual's role and performance opportunities for the development of our country, as well as the social value of each person, thus ensuring their active and independent civic engagement.

Civic participation is a much broader concept than the concept of patriotism – it includes a practical student expression that can and should contribute to a continuous process of education both during the lessons and after them. „To build the environment at school that promotes learning and development of civic education, it is necessary to coordinate the overall objectives of civic education at school with a real life processes.” (Čekse et al., 2010: 11).

At the same time, the objectives of civic education program should be discussed at the national level and teaching methods in general educational institutions must be developed from primary school stage up to the secondary school stage, focusing on prerequisite and opportunities of the development of each age group. The possible target of the program could be – to develop students' sense of belonging to their country by promoting participation and civic patriotism.

Implementation of the program should be closely linked with the development of teachers' professional competence as well as the prerequisites of pupils' cognitive development through multi-interdisciplinary educational and non-formal education-based approach. The elaboration of civic education program would promote the achievement of the goal of the Education law of the Republic of Latvia – to ensure that every citizen of Latvia is able to develop his/her mental and physical potential to become an independent and advanced individual, the member of a democratic society of Latvia (Izglītības likums, 1998). Upbringing process in general education schools is directed towards child's and youngster's comprehensive understanding of values and establishment of evaluative attitude and responsibility for actions (Valsts izglītības satura centrs, 2011: 3).

Without excluding the other probabilities, some suggestions are offered on the possibilities to promote civic education, teaching and learning beyond the cross-curricular links as well as the differentiated teaching methods:

- 1) during the classes of the History of Latvia and Literature, looking at, e.g. the activities of Young Latvians the role of the individual should be highlighted, as well as and the implications of changes in the processes of national identity discussed, thus highlighting student's attention to the ability of each individual to participate in the development of the nation;
- 2) during the Math lessons it would be possible to turn into practice the process of voter turnout in the Parliamentary and Municipal elections. During the Economics the active or passive participation of civil impact on the national economy could be analyzed;
- 3) during the Social science or Upbringing lessons teaching responsibility abstractly is not assumed, but, for example, through organizing charity events with students, such as donating board games for children at risk or hold a small concert at a nursing home. The collaboration with the school library is a good idea as well, that could include repairing of school

textbooks, etc. activities. Teacher's creativity and initiative are only required in a successful implementation;

- 4) to provide the necessary support and motivation for the governance of students at school. Exact operating in the following school institutions students have the potential to test their skills and participation in practice, promoting the development of their schools.

Developing students' civic education programs, educational content would be optimized and targeted through implementing existing subjects with the realization of interdisciplinary approaches that would help students learn better, thus contributing to students' holistic understanding and knowledge acquired tied to practical work.

Discussion and conclusion

Diskusija un noslēgums

The inclusion of young people in the society and the reaching of the life goals are directly connected with the possibilities of education. In order for the society to become more active towards change and problem solving the result of education must be a high level of civic education. An individual has to be prepared for participation in political processes even though the environment does not always support it. By developing change, based on the requirements of our time, in our educational system we can focus on the potential of civic education. Civic participation allows an individual to be an aware, responsible, critical and active citizen.

The competence of individual civic participation is created by the ability to research political and social problems and the amount of the overall integral skills, such as the ability to learn, make decisions, skills of interaction and social cooperation. In order to acquire these skills in school in a purposeful way that is relevant to the challenges of our time, the existing content of civic education has to be improved and the possibilities for democratic participation must be promoted within schools. This must be done not only by enlarging the spectrum of knowledge (the traditional approach), but by ensuring a permanent participation in actions that promote social interaction skills which allow the acquiring of many-sided information about the processes of the surrounding society, helping the practical use of knowledge and decision making skills.

Civic education affects the quality of life of each individual and the society. Personality traits such as self-esteem, the ability to control your own fate, civic and social competence, altruism and empathy are just as important as cognitive abilities. The personality development of students has an enormous role in the pedagogical process in the context of civic education.

Kopsavilkums

Summary

Publikācijā ir aktualizēti nozīmīgi pilsoniskās izglītības komponenti, kas izglītības satura reformēšanas procesā kļūst par ietekmīgiem pilsoniskās līdzdalības pilnveides elementiem. Apkopojot vairāku teorētisko pieeju atziņas, darba autori atklāj pilsoniskās līdzdalības fenomena veidošanās priekšnosacījumus un tā nozīmīgumu vispārīglītojošās skolas pedagoģiskajā procesā. Neskatoties uz pilsoniskās sabiedrības jautājuma iekšējo sarežģītību, Latvijas sociālās un politiskās realitātes konteksts izvirza nepieciešamību pēc sabiedrības locekļu pilsoniskās līdzdalības dimensijas. Dzīvojot strauji mainīgajā laikmetā un apzinoties nepieciešamību pēc pilsoniskās līdzdalības, kura izriet no sabiedrības indivīdiem, lai veicinātu sabiedrības ilgtspējīgo attīstību, ir nepieciešams aktualizēt un pilnveidot pilsoniskās izglītības audzinošo potenciālu vispārīglītojošajā skolā, kvalitatīvi bagātinot un mērķtiecīgi strukturējot izglītības saturu. Rezultātā bagātinātais izglītības saturs, pateicoties pilsoniskās līdzdalības aspektu stiprināšanai, kā arī sabalansēto teorētisko zināšanu un praktisko kompetenču līdzsvarotai apguvei skolās, sekmētu pilsoniski aktīvas, valstiski domājošas, rīcībspējīgas un atbildīgas personības veidošanos, kas ir neatņemams valsts ilgtermiņa attīstības nosacījums.

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