



IDEAS ON CIVIC EDUCATION IN 20th CENTURY EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

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This article provides a scientific analysis of the principal ideas on civic education in 20th century European and Western philosophy. The democratic education concept of John Dewey, the communicative reason and public sphere theory of Jürgen Habermas, and Hannah Arendt's concept of active life (vita activa) are examined from the perspective of civic education. The article highlights the influence of these ideas on contemporary civic education practice and their relevance for Uzbekistan.

Introduction

20th century European and American philosophy elevated the theory of civic education to an entirely new level. While ancient thinkers linked civic upbringing to the stability of the polis, 20th century philosophers approached this question within a broad social, political, and epistemological context. Two world wars, the rise and fall of totalitarian regimes, decolonization, and subsequently globalization and the information revolution — all of these developments compelled 20th century thinkers to return repeatedly to the questions of who the citizen is and how they should be educated.

In the 20th century, the philosophy of civic education developed around three main currents: pragmatism (John Dewey), the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Jürgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno), and phenomenological-political philosophy (Hannah Arendt). Each of these currents made a distinctive theoretical contribution to civic education, laying the foundation of modern democratic pedagogy.

Main Body

John Dewey's Concept of Democratic Education. American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) is considered the most influential theorist of civic education in the 20th century. His 1916 work *Democracy and Education* serves as the foundational text for virtually all contemporary theories of civic education. For Dewey, democracy is not merely a form of government but a way of life for people who live together and share experiences with one another. Therefore, educating the democratic citizen begins not merely with imparting political knowledge, but with making the school environment itself democratic. Dewey's educational pragmatism rests on three core principles: first, 'Learning by doing' — knowledge is gained not from books but from practical experience; second, social problem-centredness — real social problems must be discussed throughout the learning process; and third, the school as a mini-society — the school should be a small replica of society, with its internal life

grounded in the principles of democratic governance. These ideas became the basis for the 'active learning' and 'project-based learning' educational movements in the second half of the 20th century. [1]

The Frankfurt School and Critical Pedagogy. Frankfurt School scholars — Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and especially Jürgen Habermas — approached civic education from a sharply critical perspective. They argued that in modern industrial society, the education system frequently becomes an instrument for reinforcing existing power relations. Habermas's contribution to civic education theory is expressed through two central concepts: 'communicative reason' (kommunikative Vernunft) and the 'public sphere' (Öffentlichkeit). According to the idea of communicative reason, citizens of a democratic society must reach shared decisions through open, manipulation-free dialogue. Education is the principal means of forming citizens capable of such dialogue. The concept of the public sphere refers to the space necessary for citizens to discuss social issues independently of state and market forces. Civic education must cultivate individuals able to participate actively in this sphere — individuals who think critically and reason independently. [2]

Hannah Arendt's 'Vita Activa' and Political Education Theory. German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) contributed a distinctive phenomenological approach to civic education. In her work *The Human Condition* (1958), she distinguished three forms of 'vita activa' — active life: labour, work, and action. For Arendt, 'action' is the highest form of civic life — it means people's joint participation in the political sphere, transforming the world through their speech and deeds. Arendt's views on education are fully set out in her essay *The Crisis in Education* (1958). She regarded the primary task of education as 'introducing' the new generation to the world: the child arrives in this world as a newcomer, and education helps the child to understand it. Political education, in turn, gives a person the ability to relate responsibly to the shared world, to pass it on from generation to generation, and to add something new to it.

Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' and Civic Education. Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (1921–1997), in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), criticized traditional education as 'banking education': the student is likened to an empty vessel and the teacher to one who 'deposits' knowledge into it. In its place, Freire proposed a 'problem-posing education' model, in which teacher and student learn together and together change the world. This idea brought revolutionary change to civic education as well: civic education came to be understood no longer as mere information transmission, but as the process of developing within the individual the capacity to transform their own life and society — what Freire called 'conscientizacao' (critical consciousness). Freire's ideas later became the foundation of the 'critical pedagogy' movement and today constitute an important theoretical source for civic education.

The Impact of 20th Century Ideas on Contemporary Civic Education. The philosophical ideas examined above have had a direct impact on contemporary civic education practice. Dewey's 'learning by doing' principle is today widely applied in schools worldwide as project-based learning and problem-based learning. Habermas's public sphere theory has been recognized as the basis for teaching debate culture, argumentation, and public speech in civic education. Arendt's concept of 'action' has found its practical expression in programmes that engage young people in political processes — school parliaments, simulated legislative sessions, and civic projects. Freire's critical pedagogy is the theoretical foundation of all contemporary programmes that view civic education as an instrument of social justice and change. For Uzbekistan, these ideas may serve as a vital source of inspiration for transforming civic education from passive knowledge transmission into an active, critical, and socially engaged pedagogy.

Conclusion

20th century European and Western philosophy placed civic education on a new intellectual foundation. The ideas of Dewey's democratic school, Habermas's communicative citizen, Arendt's political action, and Freire's critical consciousness together constitute the theoretical basis of modern civic education. Their shared conclusion is that civic education is not a process of moulding individuals into ready-made templates, but an education for freedom — one that helps a person to understand their world, to think critically, and to become capable of transforming society together with others.

Applying these ideas to the civic education system of Uzbekistan and harmonizing them with national pedagogical traditions should be considered an important strategic direction for contemporary educational reform.

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