



A pedagogy of freedom as a viable basis for implementing gender equality in Ukraine's educational institutions

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Accepted: 7 April 2023 / Published online: 11 May 2023
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Abstract

In the state policies of European Union (EU) member countries, gender issues have become one of the main priorities since the 1990s, and independent Ukraine and Ukrainian non-governmental organisations have also gradually joined this agenda. Over the past three decades, Ukraine has engaged in efforts to restructure its educational institutions and processes on the basis of democratic principles free from any form of discrimination, including gender-related discrimination. These efforts have been promoted through joint projects with UN Women and other international organisations. While gender equality improvement strategies are now reflected in Ukrainian legislation, they are not yet fully implemented on the ground. In the context of presenting their concept of a pedagogy of freedom as a viable basis for the implementation of gender equality in Ukraine's educational institutions, the authors analyse research literature devoted to addressing freedom and gender equality in educational policies. They conclude that individual learners' free self-determination, self-development and self-realisation can only be an effective factor in realising gender equality if pedagogical activity and learning spaces are designed to support the development of learners' full potential.

Keywords Gender equality · Personal freedom · Personal development · Lifelong learning · Learning space · Ukraine

Résumé

Une pédagogie de la liberté comme base viable pour mettre en place l'égalité des genres dans les établissements d'enseignement en Ukraine – Dans les politiques

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nationales des pays membres de l'Union européenne (UE), les questions de genre font partie des grandes priorités depuis les années 1990, un agenda que l'Ukraine indépendante et les organisations non gouvernementales ukrainiennes ont graduellement adopté. Ces trois dernières décennies, le pays a entrepris des efforts pour restructurer ses établissements et processus d'enseignement en s'appuyant sur des principes démocratiques dépourvus de toute forme de discrimination, y compris de discrimination liée au genre. Ces efforts ont été encouragés grâce à des projets conjoints avec ONU Femmes et d'autres organisations internationales. Tandis que les stratégies visant à améliorer l'égalité des genres se reflètent à présent dans la législation ukrainienne, elles ne sont pas pleinement mises en œuvre sur le terrain. Dans le cadre de la présentation de leur concept d'une pédagogie de la liberté en tant que base viable pour la mise en œuvre de l'égalité des genres dans les établissements d'enseignement en Ukraine, les autrices analysent la littérature scientifique consacrée à la liberté et l'égalité des genres dans les politiques de l'éducation. Elles concluent que l'autodétermination individuelle des apprenants ainsi que leur développement et leur réalisation personnels ne peuvent être un facteur efficace pour réaliser l'égalité des genres que si l'activité pédagogique et les espaces d'apprentissage sont conçus pour favoriser le développement de tout le potentiel des apprenants.

Introduction

In the three decades prior to the Russian invasion and the subsequent, ongoing, war in Ukraine, the integration of Ukraine into the European community has prompted efforts to restructure all institutions and processes on the basis of democratic principles free from any form of discrimination, including gender-related discrimination. In the state policies of European Union (EU) member countries, gender issues have become one of the main priorities since the 1990s, and independent Ukraine and Ukrainian non-governmental organisations have also gradually joined this agenda.

Progress towards gender equality is a key marker of democratic transition. Since its independence, Ukrainian civil society has sought to strengthen the voices and capacities of groups pushing for equality and inclusion (EIGE 2021).

The values and principles of the Millennium Development Goals conceptualised by the United Nations (UN) at the beginning of the 21st century (UN 2000) became the basis of the the “Ukrainian law on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women” (GoU 2005). Its goal was to achieve parity of women and men in all spheres of social life by legally ensuring their equal rights and opportunities. In particular, this included the application of appropriate measures to redress the gender imbalance which still exists in terms of the opportunities open to citizens, despite the enshrinement of equal rights in the Ukrainian Constitution (GoU 2019 [1996]). The equal rights act also served as one of the starting points for the Ukrainian educational community in addressing gender issues.

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, Ukraine joined a wide range of organisations already engaged in the process of forming educational policy regarding the issue of gender, in particular the World Bank, UN agencies (the United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], United Nations Women [UN Women] and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]), non-governmental organisations, etc., whose priority tasks were to overcome gender disparities and to promote of gender equality throughout the education system (UNESCO 2016a; UN Women 2022).

Upon gaining its independence in 1991, Ukraine recognised and ratified all international instruments on gender equality, and this is reflected in Ukraine's legal framework (the Constitution of Ukraine, the Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers, etc.). Moreover, a dedicated strategy entitled "Education: Gender dimension – 2020" (GoU 2018) was specifically developed and adopted for the implementation of gender equality and non-discrimination in the field of education. This strategy defines the basic principles, aim, strategic goals, objectives, target groups, spheres of implementation and implementation of public policy in this field (*ibid.*). However, despite the approval by the Governmental Committee on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in January 2018, the aforementioned strategy was not approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine due to pressure from some religious organisations.¹

This non-approval prompted a debate around issues of learners' personal freedom development in terms of gender equality at all levels of education, regardless of teachers' and learners' religious faith. In recent years, our country has strengthened as an independent state and hardened in the battles for freedom and the right to live in a free civilised world. As a result, Ukraine has become a candidate for joining the EU (CoEU 2023). In our opinion, the policy of gender equality, where the development of individual freedom makes obvious progress in all spheres of social development of Ukrainian society, including education, certainly played an important role in the acquisition of this status.

There is no doubt that the democratisation of Ukrainian society during the years of independence has led to a certain reorientation of the educational system to instil in the young generation universal and national values, tolerance and an appreciation of multiculturalism. This reorientation includes the possibility of free personal development of each individual, and the freedom to choose an individual life path. In this context it is important to note that some recent Ukrainian research has focused on the gender component in our country's socio-cultural, educational and pedagogical reality. The academic community in independent Ukraine became interested in the ideas of anthropology, neuropedagogy, feminist and gender pedagogy based on a gender-centric approach. This allowed scholars to not only mark the differences in the status and roles of women and men, but also to interpret the cultural and social significance of these differences in the context of the gender equality problem (Basiuk 2018; Vykhor 2018; Doronina 2018; Gretchenko 2007; Dukh 2018; Emiriliasova 2016; Bekirova and Zaredinova 2018; Karnauh 2018; Samoilenko 2015; Tkachova 2015; Shabaieva 2018; Shtyliova 2008, etc.).

¹ For more on Ukrainian religious communities' struggle with gender issues, see Elsner (2022).

Education is indeed a powerful stimulus for social change in Ukraine and a modifier for the achievement of human rights, of which personal freedom is the first in the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood (UN 1948, Art. 1).

Personal freedom increases the development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills of the individual, ensures labour productivity and determines further effective activity throughout life. In the context of gender as a social construct, personal freedom as a facilitating prerequisite for personal and professional development and growth applies to both sexes and determines the ability of each individual to be prepared for their own choice of life path.

Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and men is central to the mandate of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2015). Within the 2030 Agenda, the fifth goal (SDG 5) seeks to

[a]chieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN 2015, p. 20), and the fourth goal (SDG 4) seeks to

[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UN 2015, p. 19).

Consequently, one of the main aims of UNESCO's *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (UNESCO 2016b) is the comprehensive and fair provision of quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for every person on the basis of the freedom to choose an individual life path and professional development, regardless of gender. The introduction of this framework to Ukraine's national education system has definitely created a basis conducive to tackling gender equality issues.

However, as a social institution, our national education system is not yet sufficiently sensitive to the need for real practical change to meet current demands.² Although it should be a flagship in the democratisation of society based on the equality of all its members without exception, and ensure the formation and development of personal freedom of every learner by preventing any form of gender-related discrimination of the individual, Ukrainian national education still lacks the necessary mobility.

Along with Ukrainian scholars Ivan Bekh (2018), Ionas Kievisas (2017; with first author), Yuozas Mureika (2019), Petro Saukh (2019) and others, both of us believe that one of the problems here is a certain imbalance of the dyad of education

² This article was drafted before the Russian invasion of February 2022. The authors' references to "current demands" refer not to the ongoing war but to the longer-term mission of transforming the country's education system. While the invasion has added significant challenges to making progress in this transformation, particular reference is not made to them in this article.

(opening intellectual and cultural pathways) and upbringing (conveying social and moral codes).³ Even in the context of the Bologna process (the alignment of European educational qualifications), the gap between education and upbringing threatens to increase, since upbringing has an autonomous, unsystematic character and does not play a proactive role (Saukh 2019) in developing a personality. Ukrainian scholars emphasise that the existing theory and practice of upbringing still does not provide an adequate answer to the question of how to live with dignity and feel like a free human being, while preserving everyone's right to freedom of choice and personal freedom, including gender equality (Alekseienko et al. 2010).

Solving this issue, in our opinion, requires the development and application of models of upbringing in modern Ukrainian education which are built at the intersection of global gender theory (Anderson et al. 2020; Blackmore 2019; Monkman 2022; Orloff and Schiff 2015; Stromquist 2017, etc.) and modern academic concepts based on the humanistic paradigm of education. The guiding principles of the latter are the humanistic values of a democratic society, in particular the cultivation of humanity in a person, the desire of each individual to improve themselves and the world, and their acquisition of relevant values and needs regarding gender equality on the basis of subject–subject interaction⁴ and personal freedom. Such ideas are most developed in the concept of a pedagogy of freedom, which, in our opinion, can become an effective basis for the creation of appropriate conditions which are able to ensure the formation of learners' personal freedom, their self-development, self-expression and self-realisation (Kievisas and Rastrygina 2017), on the basis of gender equality and egalitarian partnership (Ivanenko 2014). Therefore, addressing these issues in our research constitutes a relevant academic and system-forming contribution towards the realisation of gender equality in Ukraine's educational institutions.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the current state of gender equality in the Ukrainian system of education, and in the next section, we formulate the problem. Based on our own concept of the pedagogy of freedom (Rastrygina 2004), we then present ways of addressing this problem by developing learners' personal freedom as a viable basis for achieving gender equality in Ukrainian educational institutions. We conclude our article with a summary of our insights and make suggestions for further research.

³ It is worth noting that the Ukrainian term *виховання* does not mean exactly the same as the English term “upbringing”, which is usually more associated with parental influence, passing on values etc. to their children as they bring them up. While “education and upbringing” are not usually combined in English, our translation of the Ukrainian usage of this combination, which is quite common, serves to capture two distinct but interrelated parts of the education process. It enables us to factor in wider societal responsibility, which includes parents but concerns education professionals and society as a whole.

⁴ Subject, here, refers to a person, regarding the learner as a participant with agency – a subject – in the learning process.

Gender (in)equality in modern Ukrainian education: formulating the problem

Addressing the problem of ensuring gender equality in the modern Ukrainian system of education is really timely since this is one of the indicators of our country's recognition as a developed state in Europe. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines *gender education* as a

[n]ecessary part of curricula at all levels of the education system, which would enable both girls and boys, women and men to understand how constructions of masculinities and femininities and models for assigning social roles – which shape our societies – influence their lives, relationships, life choices, career trajectories, etc. (EIGE 2016)

Gender education and upbringing as a conceptual idea of modern educational theory and practice cannot be limited to the introduction of gender training courses or certain educational work. Today, it involves, first of all, the formation and development of a new worldview, devoid of male and female hierarchies, the creation of a gender-balanced comfortable educational space capable of ensuring the formation of learners' personal freedom. This corresponds to the development of their subject activity towards self-development, self-expression and self-realisation based on the dynamism and openness of the educational environment and the dialogic regime of the subjects of the educational process in order to improve the gender component in the education system as a whole.

Gender equality in present-day Ukrainian educational policy

Issues of gender equality, which are on the agenda of Ukrainian state bodies, relevant organisations and the academic community, require the expansion of the vector of understanding of this problem in the theory and practice of the Ukrainian education system. In the amendments made to the relevant state documents, such as the Act on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women (GoU 2005; with changes introduced in 2013, 2014 and 2018), the basic understanding of gender equality is specified as

equal legal status of women and men and equal opportunities for its implementation, which allows persons of both sexes to participate equally in all spheres of society's life. (GoU 2005; supplement to Article 1: Definition of terms).⁵

Also, the main directions and mechanisms of state policy are determined to ensure such opportunities on the basis of the rights and freedoms of every person defined by the Constitution of Ukraine (GoU 2019 [1996]). It is clear that the urgent issues that need to be addressed in the education sector are closely related to how key

⁵ This, and all other quotations from Ukrainian sources were translated into English for the purposes of this article.

categories are conceptualised both in global gender education policies and directly at the national level.

In this context, a review of relevant international literature is useful for identifying research findings which might be extrapolated to the Ukrainian education system. For example, Elisabet Öhrn and Gaby Weiner's research on gender, justice and equity in education considers topics and practices constituting the field of gender and education. They note that key topics addressed by researchers include various types of statistical measurements, patterns of success during exams, curricula, the diversity of femininities and masculinities created during training and education, etc. But at the same time, there is a decrease in focus on the theorisation of gender and educational practice regarding the implementation of gender equality (Öhrn and Weiner 2017).

Karen Monkman, updating those key issues of gender equality in global education policies which currently need the most attention, points to persistent "quality concerns in curriculum, pedagogy, and related contextual influences" (Monkman 2021, p. 8). She emphasises that statistical data and measurement tests do not give a complete picture of the quality of education, stressing that it is much more important to pay attention to other factors that influence our understanding of gender as a social construct. In particular, she mentions the created school environment, the content of what is taught (curriculum), the quality of education (pedagogy) and what is not taught or studied. It is quite difficult to do this, the author emphasises, but it is "necessary if education is to alter inequitable social structures" (ibid., p. 9). Fully agreeing with Öhrn and Weiner (2017) and Monkman (2021), we believe that it is the upbringing component of educational practice which is quite difficult to implement into the usual curriculum, as well as the specially organised learning space of the educational institution. It is the environment where, thanks to appropriate pedagogical conditions, the formation of learners' personal freedom will take place, constituting one important factor in the implementation of gender equality in the education system of a modern egalitarian society.

It should be mentioned that the introduction of the fundamentals of global gender theory into the educational policy of modern Ukraine prompted a significant increase in the number of Ukrainian research centres, public organisations and researchers in the field of education investigating the problem of gender (in)equality in recent years. There is quite an intensive academic and educational exchange regarding the issue of gender equality in various academic fields. Applied aspects of the implementation of their results, the study of features, different social roles, duties and identities of men and women, etc., are being developed, which is causing a new level of academic interest in a deeper study of various aspects of the problem of gender (in)equality in a modern democratic society.

For Ukrainian society, the gender mainstreaming policy, proclaimed as one of the main means of societal democratisation and based on the European *Gender Equality Strategy 2014–2017* (CoE 2014) has become of particular importance for overcoming gender asymmetry and inequality in all spheres of human activity, including in the field of education (Hrytsiak 2011). We are impressed by Susanne Baer and Ute Kletzing's position regarding gender mainstreaming, which promotes systematic consideration of gender issues at all levels and by all sectors of the mainstream

(Baer and Kletzing 2004). We absolutely support Baer and Kletzing's opinion that it is not about instructions, but about the possibilities and necessity of changes in the sense of real respect for personal freedom and individual life decisions of each person regarding their own life activities, as much as possible regardless of their gender. This means true freedom of personal choice, irrespective of the perceived "natural roles" for men or for women, eliminating the decisive influence of a person's gender on their life and their socio-cultural and professional activities. Thus, the European *Gender Equality Strategy 2014–2017* (CoE 2014) provides a more responsible response to people's needs, and this is exactly the gender equality policy for free people in civilised countries which Ukraine should contribute to.

Of course, gender relations differ in different countries and cultures and can vary even among various population groups within the same nation. Therefore, the issue of achieving European standards in solving the problem of gender (in)equality has been updated on the agenda of the Ukrainian state. Positive changes in this direction are evidenced in the participation of Ukrainians in a fairly large number of programmes and projects sponsored by the World Bank (2016), various UN agencies, governmental and non-governmental agencies, private individuals, etc. One example of such cooperation for a deeper understanding of the social construct of gender was a project entitled "Gender equality and development: A poverty reduction strategy in the context of Ukraine's European strategy" (Razumkov Centre 2016). Other examples include a UN Women project entitled "Transformative approaches to achieving gender equality in Ukraine" funded by the Swedish government and a project conducted by the Partnership for Local Economic Development and Democratic Governance (PLEDDG)⁶ entitled "Local gender initiatives 2017–2018: Implementation experience". Two slightly earlier projects investigating the status of gender equality at different educational levels were "Promoting the spread of gender equality in the education system in three regions of Ukraine: Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Ternopil" (2014); and "Gender mainstreaming in higher educational institutions of Ukraine" (SumDU 2015). The main message of the latter was to promote the achievement of gender equality and the implementation of gender-sensitive approaches in Ukrainian universities in order to implement the policy of equal rights and opportunities for male and female students, which allows full self-realisation of each individual, regardless of gender.

The policy of gender equality is also discussed by Olga Stefanishyna, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, in her foreword to the *Methodological recommendations for integrating gender approaches into the system of training specialists for the security and defence sector of Ukraine* (MEEAIU 2020). These recommendations were jointly prepared by a team of experts from the Ministry for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine (MEEAIU), teachers of educational institutions, and the above-mentioned UN Women programme, with the support of the Government of the Kingdom of

⁶ For more information in English, visit <http://pleddg.org.ua/en/genderna-rivnist/> [accessed 6 March 2023] and see Chorna-Bokhniak (2019).

Sweden. Stefanishyna emphasises that the gender approach is about equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for everyone;

democratic values based on the rule of law and human rights ... These values should be the basis of the education system, especially in such a key area for Ukrainian society today as security and defence ... But gender mainstreaming is not just about calculating the percentage of men and women in certain positions. It is about making equal rights and opportunities for women and men the ideological foundation of public life (ibid., p. 2).

Therefore, a positive trend in modern Ukrainian society, both at the state level and in education policy, is the strengthening of attention to the creation of the same social conditions for each and every citizen in terms of facilitating their use of the chance to build a professional career, participate in political processes, and realise the desire to discover their personal and professional advantages in a field which quite recently and *a priori* was considered purely female or male.

Gender issues in the academic discourse of Ukrainian educationists

As mentioned above, the conceptualisation of gender issues in other countries' educational policies in recent decades has been comprehensively and carefully presented in the studies of many international scholars (Blackmore 2019; Monkman 2021; Novotna 2021; Orloff 2015; Paulíček 2016; Stromquist 2017) whose works became the basic foundation of gender theory. Thus, Monkman's deep and consistent analysis provides an overview of the process of formation of global educational policies on gender issues from its first steps to the present day (Monkman 2021). In the context of our own research, it is of interest that she singled out certain stages of this process which correspond to relevant academic Ukrainian research in the early 2000s. It is during this period that Ukrainian studies appear which follow an attempt to get rid of the consequences of authoritarian pedagogy and focus on finding ways to overcome gender stereotypes on the basis of humanistic values of a democratic society as a foundation for truly ensuring gender equality both in the life of each person and in education and upbringing.

The trajectory of Ukrainian scholars' academic research during this period is connected with attempts to balance the hidden gender discrimination and asymmetry in the educational process and ensure the absence of hierarchy and inequality of "male" and "female" in the pedagogical community (Dudchak 2018). In this context, issues most often raised related to the biological and social characteristics of representatives of different sexes, sexual education, the introduction of a gender component in the content of educational subjects, the problem of mixed or single-sex training in the organisation of the educational process (Sydorenko 2017).

Academic studies of supporters of sex-role education (Artiukhova 2007; Ilchenko 2011; Kon 2009; Mazur 2005; Muntian 2004) were devoted to changes in the organisation of the educational process, the creation of curricula, programmes, educational literature, compilation of tasks taking into account gender features, the selection of appropriate forms and methods of education. Although scholars proclaimed

the importance of observing the gender approach, creating certain prerequisites for the academic and pedagogical community to realise this necessity, most of them remained observers of the usual dichotomous model at all levels of education. This was manifested in the consideration in the education process of gender differences, which were distinguished on the basis of biological differences between men and women, the physiology of nervous activity, evolutionary theory, psychology, etc. Therefore, the pursuit of gender equality declared in the post-Soviet society, even under the “cover” of gender terminology, in the end only resulted in giving gender differences the status of naturally determined ones. Thus, pedagogical activity continued to uphold an unchanging traditionalist model, determined by a female/male dichotomy and imagined as something eternal, objective and super-specific (Bem 1983).

By contrast, proponents of the socio-gender approach denied the absolute biological determination of relations between the sexes. They emphasised that there is biological sex and there is gender, that is, “social sex”. These scholars argued that the concept of “gender” indicates, first of all, the social status of a person at a certain stage of socio-cultural development. Given this interpretation of “gender”, Anatoly Mudryk emphasises a wide range of manifestations, which, despite gender differences, are characteristic of both boys and girls, men and women, and are related to their sex-age status, ethical-confessional and socio-cultural affiliation (Mudryk 2007).

The need to reconcile Ukrainian academic tradition with Western gender methodology has led to attempts to combine gender and sex role education as mutually related, but not identical. Elena Kharlova (2006) notes that, being a multi-component structure that synthesises both the cultural and the biological in a person, gender is determined by four groups of characteristics: biological sex, gender stereotypes, gender norms and gender identity. She emphasises that for the effective implementation of gender equality in education and upbringing, the most important thing is to reveal the unique abilities, the inner world of every person, and to find ways of their individual spiritual and cultural development, regardless of their gender (ibid.). The goal of a gender equality approach, according to Lyubov Shtyliova, is to eliminate the application of traditional cultural restrictions to the development of an individual’s potential because of that person’s gender (Shtyliova 2008). So, despite the education sector’s declared focus on the person-oriented model of the humanistic paradigm of education, and the recognition of the need to introduce the ideas of gender equality into the educational process, the scholars’ positions were still contradictory and demonstrated a rather wide range of approaches to the specified problem. For example, Svitlana Vykhor emphasises that the prerequisite for the implementation of a gender-responsive upbringing, the result of which should be gender-sensitive behaviour, involves the absence of an orientation towards specific purposes of the education of a man or a woman. While mitigating gender stereotypes, this approach takes into account social and gender differences (Vykhor 2018). Scholars who combined gender upbringing with a continued recognition of sex-related roles were thus still unable to move away from the gender stereotype.

Researchers who adhere to the egalitarian approach focus their attention on the ineffectiveness of traditional ideas about the relationship between the sexes,

especially when it concerns the upbringing component of the education process (Gaidenko 2006). Based on an egalitarian worldview, Rusana Lionchuk believes that the gender approach appears as a mechanism for achieving gender equality and establishing opportunities for self-realisation of each individual (Lionchuk 2010). According to Tatyana Golovanova, gender education of the egalitarian type focuses on respect for personal rights and self-realisation of the individual, regardless of gender (Golovanova 2018). The same opinion is held by Tatyana Doronina, who considers gender education and upbringing as a process of individual self-development, involving socially significant experience through the acquisition of knowledge (historical-cultural, socio-legal and psychological-pedagogical) about gender equality, and skills (tolerant behaviour) regarding the personal freedom of everyone (Doronina 2018). Thus, it seems that the achievement of gender equality demands a new vision of the problem of gender (in)equality, and therefore, it requires the reconstruction of the organisation and content of education in general and its upbringing component in particular.

A critical analysis of the academic literature reviewed above suggests that the majority of Ukrainian scholars see the mission of the gender approach as freeing the educational process from the most rigid gender stereotypes. This involves expanding the educational space to facilitate the development of personal freedom and self-realisation of each individual on the basis of the principles of gender equality, and to improve learners' educational process in the spirit of an equal (egalitarian) partnership as a harmonisation of relations between the two sexes.

Thus, we must state that the first two decades of this century have become a period when Ukrainian researchers gained a certain theoretical and methodological experience in the introduction of the gender component into the field of education. However, this process now requires further fundamental academic development, a deeper understanding of many urgent tasks, overcoming the gap between theoretical achievements and the needs of real practice.

Academic gender studies in the working practice of Ukrainian institutions of higher education

We support the opinion of modern scholars about the need to expand academic studies on the acceptance and awareness of the “gender” phenomenon, the basis of which is two sexes, their mutual relations, interconnection and mutual determination. Each individual (both the learner and the teacher) realises their personal freedom as the most important value of a democratic society by using the opportunity to go beyond rigid gender prescriptions and getting closer to that inner state in which it is possible to understand the inner world of another person, their right to free choice, which correlates with completely different gender dispositions than their own, on an equal basis.

This view is confirmed by Ukrainian scholars who are actively working on issues of gender equality in the education system. Their aim is to resolve certain contradictions that still exist in this regard which are hindering the development of modern gender education strategies required for European integration. The study of gender

equality issues in the context of training future teachers as professional specialists with a clearly defined position regarding the understanding of the gender dimension and the application of theoretical knowledge in real practice is becoming especially relevant for the educational field. In our opinion, first of all, this concerns the improvement of teacher training, making it capable of building egalitarian relationships between the actors in the educational process, respecting the personal freedom of everyone; fostering the ability to create a gender-sensitive educational and learning environment aimed at learners' self-determination, self-development and self-realisation, causing a qualitative change in their subjective education regarding personal freedom as a factor of gender equality. In other words, we are talking about teachers becoming specialists of a modern format in the university environment, ready to implement the ideas of the New Ukrainian School,⁷ including the introduction of a gender approach in the development process of a personality, which in adult life is able to fully realise its potential regardless of gender. This is also reflected in the list of graduates' general competencies recommended by Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science in its *Methodical recommendations for the development of higher education standards* (MoES 2016). The list includes the ability to realise the right to freedom, equal opportunities and gender issues.

Examples of the practical implementation of the gender equality programme on the basis of an egalitarian worldview are the productive activities of a significant number of Ukrainian higher education institutions (Velykodna 2018; Vorovka 2019, p. 383). A prominent place among them is occupied by Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State Pedagogical University (CUSPU), whose academic and pedagogical staff includes ourselves, the authors of this article. Along with the active implementation of the policy of equal rights, opportunities and freedom of choice while entering university, efforts at CUSPU also include attempts to eliminate gender asymmetry of academic and teaching staff as well as the introduction of a gender component into the educational process at the level of educational and professional programmes and subjects with appropriate informational, methodological and practice-oriented support. University staff are currently involved in international projects with the aim of improving the strategy and tactics of gender relations that meet international standards and the needs of a modern democratic society with egalitarian values.

In 2008, the Interdisciplinary Scientific Centre of Applied Research (ISCAR) was created at CUSPU with the purpose of obtaining results from interdisciplinary applied research conducted by university staff, undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate and doctoral students. In recent years, large-scale work conducted within the framework of ISCAR explored European values and experience in promoting the issue of gender equality both at the level of university education and in the context of the formation of the New Ukrainian School. This research was carried out in cooperation with two European programmes: (1) the Trans-European Mobility

⁷ "The New Ukrainian School is a key reform of the Ministry of Education and Science. The main objective is to create a school that will be pleasant to go to and will provide the students not only with knowledge, as is the case now, but also with the ability to apply it in real life" (MoES 2017).

Programme for University Studies (TEMPUS), in the project entitled “Educational measurements adapted to EU standards” (2009–2012); and (2) the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS+) in the project entitled “Gender Studies training programme: a step towards democracy and peace in neighbouring countries of the EU with different traditions” (2015–2018).

Subnational gender equality: balancing EU values and Ukrainian realities

In the context of solving priority tasks for Ukrainian higher education regarding the development of personal freedom of the young generation on the basis of European values as a factor in effectively solving gender equality issues, the international project “Subnational gender equality: Balancing EU values and Ukrainian realities” (ISCAR 2022) deserves special attention. It is a steppingstone to strengthening international academic cooperation, under the “Jean Monnet Actions” within the Erasmus+ programme.⁸ It was launched at CUSPU in 2022. As part of the implementation of the project, the organisers plan to hold a variety of events aimed at shaping the ability of students and teachers to navigate the particularities of international European practice in the field of gender equality, overcoming gender stereotypes and prejudices in education, and mastering the technologies of gender education. This is taking place in the form of introducing optional courses into the teaching practice of students of pedagogical specialties, as well as in the form of holding summer schools, etc.

We, the authors of this article, are ourselves involved in this project (ISCAR 2022) and will introduce a module on “The development of gender equality in the learning space of higher education institutions” into the teaching practice of master students (pedagogical majors) within the framework of the course “Pedagogy of freedom in the paradigmatic space of modern education and upbringing” (already part of the current curriculum). According to our own deep conviction, in a democratic society with egalitarian values, gender education should become a process of free self-development of each individual. This process should enable the individual to master the socially significant humanistic experience of humanity through awareness, understanding and acquisition of historical-cultural, socio-legal and psychological-pedagogical knowledge, focused on respect for the rights and freedom of the individual and the formation of personality on the basis of free self-determination and self-realisation, regardless of gender.

Therefore, the development of gender equality should not be so much about the content of education as about the reconstruction of the upbringing component of the educational process on the basis of democratic values of the humanistic paradigm of education. In this case, gender upbringing as a practice of personal freedom development, including the concept of “consciousness”, endows the individual

⁸ The European Commission launched the Jean Monnet Actions in 1989 to promote excellence in teaching and research in the field of European Union studies worldwide, with a particular focus on higher education institutions. For more information, visit <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/jean-monnet-actions> [accessed 6 March 2023].

with a transforming power and determines the development of their critical thinking as the basis of a democratic society. It is at this level that the fundamental principle of upbringing as a practice of freedom is realised, and the consciousness of the individual comes to the surface, demonstrating a “critical intervention in the world” (Ivanenko 2014, p. 11). Such an approach requires the creation of a favourable gender-comfortable environment which provides mental awareness of the spiritual and value foundations of an egalitarian society, and thus the perception of each person in their full integrity and significance as an individual, promoting the realisation of their creative potential without prejudice. In such a context, one important factor of modern upbringing is its dialogic character, which addresses the problem of self-development and self-realisation of all participants in the educational process, regardless of gender. We see the expansion of the scope of research on the basis of the fundamental principles of the concept of a pedagogy of freedom as a decisive factor in achieving gender equality for everyone in the learning space of educational institutions.

The pedagogy of freedom as a conceptual basis for the realisation of gender equality in the education system

Personal freedom in the context of the gender equality issue

As mentioned above, the strategy of improving the education system in terms of gender equality presupposes, first of all, the appropriation of democratic values by the individual, the main ones of which are equality, egalitarianism and freedom. In our view, these are the fundamental categories at the centre of attention of the world pedagogical community today, and the degree of their achievement becomes the main criterion of civilisation, general cultural development and democracy of any society, including that of Ukraine. In view of the purpose of this article, our concept of the pedagogy of freedom builds on both foreign and Ukrainian academic research into the correlation between the categories of freedom and gender equality (Abbagnano 1992; Berlin 2005; Novotna 2021, etc.). However, the academic output of researchers dedicated to addressing freedom and gender equality in educational policies is quite scattered and discrete. Therefore, considering learners’ personal freedom in the contextual field of the problem of gender (in)equality, it is appropriate, in our opinion, to dwell briefly on the philosophical aspect of the issue under consideration.

According to modern scholars (Novotna 2021; Ray et al. 2010), the study of complex interrelationships between freedom, gender equality and social (educational) policy requires taking into account the two most important characteristics of the concepts of freedom: negative freedom and positive freedom. According to Isaiah Berlin’s conceptualisation of the historically rooted dichotomy of these concepts, *negative freedom* (freedom from) is the absence of barriers, restrictions and external interference from others, that is, the absence of obstacles outside the subject that prevent her/him from acting. *Positive freedom* (freedom for) implies the subject’s free choice of their own path and activity, their own understanding of what is the

highest value in life and the opportunity to actively move towards its realisation (Berlin 2005, p. 233). Noting that such a dichotomy is reflected in the gender distinction, Lucie Novotna offers her own concept of what she terms “positive negative freedom” as a symbiosis of the most appropriate categories of gender characteristics in each of them:

The concept of positive negative freedom is a concept of positive freedom that takes negative freedom as its reference value. It is positive freedom because it takes into account social context of individuals and attempts to rearrange social conditions of individuals to grant choices to men and women within [the] public/private domain. Simultaneously, it is negative freedom because an aim of such rearrangement is to increase scope of non-interference from subtle forms of coercion arising from embedded gender order (Novotna 2021, p. 7).

Extrapolating her developed concept to the plane of gender equality leads Novotna to come to the conclusion that positive negative freedom extends to everyone, regardless of gender, providing them with “a space of non-interference, as it addresses the conditions under which such a space can arise” (ibid., p. 15). This gender dichotomy is put into the liberal model’s conceptualisation of freedom, either considering only individuals and their own choices (negative freedom) or understanding subjects as contextually social in their ability to make choices (positive freedom). Thus, positive negative freedom fits into the humanist understanding of gender equality through the erasure of the historically established boundary between the individual and society (Novotna 2021).

Freedom, then, is a civilised human awareness of all other universal values, a conscious humanistic attitude to being, to oneself, to others. Therefore, freedom is self-disclosure of a person both to themselves and to others. And it is thanks to the freedom of being that the personality acquires completeness, clarity and self-transparency. Freedom is an act of faith and revelation, self-mastery, a full acceptance of human responsibilities to oneself and society as a whole (Abbagnano 1992). At the same time, it is important to specify that freedom is not only a relationship between the individual (“I”) and their activity, but also a conscious acceptance of the axiom of the freedom and equality of any person in any activity, regardless of gender. Since freedom must be conscious and equal with the freedom and rights of other people, freedom and gender equality become two interdependent and mutually determined characteristics of everyone’s existence. In such a context, freedom and equality are interrelated categories, a relationship which ultimately justifies considering them from the perspective of this unity.

Therefore, the free development of the individual on the basis of freedom and gender equality, despite national, religious and gender differences, is today one of the most important and relevant issues in educational policy in general, and in pedagogical science in particular. We understand *personal freedom* as a specifically human selective and coordinated activity of the consciousness, will and spiritual and creative forces of an individual in the process of their purposeful and expedient activity, as an opportunity to independently make a choice, make a decision and implement it, as well as the ability to manage oneself in accordance with the freedom of others on a parity basis (Rastrygina 2004). In the process of

the development of personal freedom, the idea of self-development and self-realisation of the individual, which is the guiding principle for many modern human-centred concepts and the concept of the pedagogy of freedom, becomes important. The idea of “self” (self-development, self-determination, self-improvement, self-actualisation, self-realisation) plays a crucial role in the concept of freedom pedagogy. Thanks to their own activity, a person acquires the “positive power” to reveal their individuality, to activate creative potential and abilities, and thus to assert their freedom and a valuable, “equal” attitude towards the freedom of others. The formation of personal freedom is determined by the internal needs of the development of both the individual themselves and society as a whole.

That is why gender differences between individuals can in no way limit the free development and self-realisation of any person in a civilised society. Therefore, there is an urgent need today to abandon double standards, when certain behaviour is recognised as acceptable for representatives of different sexes, and deviations from accepted norms are condemned. A person cannot be happy without freedom, but very often, even within their family or in the educational process, they face a certain limitation due to the gender roles still upheld by their fellow humans. Undoubtedly, this jeopardises or destroys the freedom of the individual, locking it into the strict framework of historically or culturally formed traditions. Therefore, in an egalitarian society, gender equality should ensure the self-realisation of each and every one, taking into account their natural and acquired abilities on the basis of equality and freedom. And it is the pedagogy of freedom, being an alternative to traditional models of the educational process, that is able to ensure the creation of a gender-friendly learning and teaching environment in educational institutions based on the free development of the personality. It enables the manifestation of learners’ personal freedom regardless of gender, the development of their personal potential for maximum self-expression and self-realisation in their own life based on egalitarian values and equal partnership.

Methodological approaches and principles of the development of personal freedom in the gender dimension

Our methodological basis of the development of personal freedom as a factor in achieving gender equality in Ukraine’s system of education using the concept of the pedagogy of freedom became a polyparadigmatic approach. Within this approach, we combined several academic angles (systemic, synergistic, cultural, personality-oriented and axiological) based on the humanistic theory of personality development. Our application of each of them made it possible to single out five important conceptual positions for solving our specified problem. In particular, we

- (a) studied the issue of freedom and gender in sociology, psychology, pedagogy and the representation of the invariant principles of the pedagogy of freedom on the basis of a *systemic approach*;

- (b) took into account the relationship between individual personal resources and the educational environment and their mutual influence on the development of personal freedom as a factor of gender equality based on a *synergistic approach*;
- (c) oriented our inquiry towards the individuality and self-worth of the individual as a subject of their own life activity grounded in a *person-oriented approach*;
- (d) took into account that achieving cultural conformity of gender equality is based on the cultural approach, which enabled us to analyse existing models of gender pedagogy in the context of the development of *modern education and upbringing*; and
- (e) established that the assignment of humanistic values of a democratic society at the level of subjective-valuable understanding of learners' personal freedom, gender equality and spiritual and creative self-expression and self-realisation regardless of gender is based on an *axiological approach*.

Our *polyparadigmatic approach*, chosen as the unifying principle of all other academic approaches presented above, made it possible for us to identify certain differences in the gender research of Ukrainian scholars. First of all, these differences are due to the still existing inconsistency between a person's actual implementation of democratic values and their mere declaration. Second, in contrast to clearly formed theoretical traditions regarding gender equality in Western societies, "to a certain extent, due to the gender role approach, sexism, gender stereotypes and asymmetry still exist" (Vorovka 2019) in Ukrainian social (pedagogical) theory and practice. Third, despite distinctions between sex-role and socio-gender concepts in post-Soviet academic thought, the difference in the understanding of the concept of "gender", continues to persist, along with the terminological confusion, as a result of which the two are mixed up and used interchangeably.

Our chosen polyparadigmatic approach confirmed the need to create a fundamentally new model built on the invariant principles of the pedagogy of freedom, as a concept that will determine free personal development of upcoming generations and, in this context, is truly capable of providing adequate gender education and upbringing. We support Yuliya Ivchenko's opinion that the basis of true gender education is the correction of the influence of gender stereotypes in favour of the disclosure and development of the individual's personal tendencies (Ivchenko 2009). To this we can add that gender education and upbringing, built on the principles of pedagogy of freedom, are aimed at the protection of a specific individual, their personal freedom, self-development and self-realisation on the basis of gender equality, gender-tolerant action and gender culture, which ensures the existence of an egalitarian society.

In determining the principles that make up the basis of the development of personal freedom, we relied on our comparative analysis of various directions of freedom education that originated and developed over almost two centuries in foreign and Ukrainian pedagogy. This allowed us to single out the provisions common to all of them, that is, a kind of invariant core, which forms the conceptual basis of the pedagogy of freedom. It is worth noting that invariance, as a property of some relationships essential for any system (including the educational system), does not change during certain transformations. Accordingly, the invariant principles of the pedagogy of freedom reflect the fundamental ideas about the essence and organisation of the educational process,

which remain constant and are explained to a greater or lesser degree in all directions of humanistic knowledge, regardless of its national, temporal or social localisation (Rastrygina 2004).

The above-mentioned principles are closely interconnected and form a hierarchical system, namely:

- (a) *the principle of self-worth of the individual* (recognition of the personality of each person as the starting point of the pedagogical process, its main goal and result; affirmation of an unconditional positive attitude towards the learner of any age and gender, trust in one's human nature and ability for self-development);
- (b) *the principle of the absolute value of each stage of human life* (affirmation of its uniqueness and self-sufficiency and the unproductiveness of the approach to the developing individual with utilitarian measures and in particular regarding gender differences);
- (c) *the principle of the naturalness of upbringing* (recognition of natural individuality as the main orientation of the pedagogical process with the understanding that existing differences between girls and boys, women and men depend not on gender, but on social and cultural status; activation of internal potential in the development of personality, taking into account only its individual characteristics regardless of gender);
- (d) *the principle of freedom* (ensuring everyone's free development and freedom to choose the types and forms of their activity in the absence of any external pressure); and
- (e) *the principle of harmonising the effects of the social and educational upbringing environment* (using the positive effects of the environment, ensuring the optimal ratio between socialisation and individualisation of learners of both sexes).

These five principles form the invariant core of the concept of pedagogy of freedom and represent a complete system, the elements of which are closely interconnected. Each of them presupposes the presence of others, includes them in a detached form. The guiding principle that holds the entire system together is the principle of personal freedom.

In the context of the above-mentioned methodological approaches and principles of the development of learners' personal freedom, we next present our own interpretation of the pedagogy of freedom as a special direction of humanistic pedagogy which considers theoretical and practical foundations of the development of the inner freedom of the individual, their subjectivity, their ability for conscious and responsible self-determination, independent choice and realisation of their own life path on the basis of egalitarian values of a democratic society (Rastrygina 2004).

Discussion: the concept of the pedagogy of freedom as a model for implementing gender equality in the education system

The concept of the pedagogy of freedom is based on a large-scale and long-term study of the idea of freedom as a complex and meaningful philosophical category, which, being a cultural phenomenon, has various manifestations in all spheres of human life. Circulating in the education system and in pedagogy as a whole, it forms a multidimensional theoretical and practical layer, which also contains a gender component. From the standpoint of the pedagogy of freedom, the result of achieving gender equality in a modern democratic society should be an internally free person, independent of gender prejudices and ready for self-determination in life. Considering the basic foundations of the pedagogy of freedom and the theory of gender, such a person is characterised by:

- (a) a high level of development of the need for personal freedom and orientation towards the democratic values of an egalitarian society;
- (b) an ability to self-regulate activity and behaviour regarding fair, equal treatment of others, regardless of gender and differences in needs or interests;
- (c) a quest for competence in matters of gender equality and deeper awareness of the social construction of gender;
- (d) a realistic and unbiased perception of the world and of others based on gender equality;
- (e) an openness to new experiences and a focus on taking into account the worldview of others, the ability to respect different views and life circumstances on the basis of gender neutrality;
- (f) a positive self-concept and strong-willed qualities that allow a person to assert themselves in personal values and accept the values of others;
- (g) self-respect together with the ability and willingness to respect other people regardless of gender;
- (h) a democratic style of communication; and
- (i) an acceptance of humanistic socio-cultural norms and the ability to form one's own "personal norms", taking into account the right of everyone to choose.

From a pedagogical point of view, a person who has the above-listed qualities is considered the ideal member of an egalitarian society, oriented towards the values of freedom and gender equality.

Psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of personal freedom as a factor in achieving gender equality in educational institutions

In the context of determining the psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of personal freedom, the idea of self-development and self-realisation of the individual becomes important. Paramount in the humanistic paradigm of education based on democratic values, the idea of "self" (self-realisation,

self-development, self-improvement) plays an important role in everyone's acquisition of "positive power" to reveal their individuality, activate their creative potential, and thereby assert their freedom.

A number of modern scholars consider psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of personal freedom in the context of the general problem of humanising educational relations (Ball 2003; Bekh 2018; Vorovka 2019; Ivanenko 2014; Rastrygina 2004, 2014, 2017; Kievisas and Rastrygina 2017 and others). For example, Georgy Ball (2003) believes that the formation of individual freedom is possible due to *two* general conditions for its development. The first one, aimed at learners' understanding of formal freedom, involves the satisfaction of their basic needs through favourable social and psychological activities and careful consideration of the individual characteristics of each. The implementation of this condition requires respect for learners' preferences, aspirations and achievements, providing them with sufficient space for the manifestation of independence and creativity. The second general condition consists of revealing to learners, regardless of gender, the possibilities of filling their freedom with fully fledged content through involvement in the achievements of civilisation and inclusion in dialogic processes of culture creation. This requires compliance with principles of humanistic education such as consistent and multifaceted dialogism (oriented, in particular, towards the encouragement of fully fledged internal dialogues), as well as respect for the individual (Ball 2003). Similarly, researchers consider pluralism, on the one hand, as a multiplicity of interacting thoughts, views and values regarding gender, advocated by teachers and learners, a tolerant and at the same time interested attitude towards the positions of partners, and on the other hand as the presence of similar interacting components in the individual consciousness of each of them.

Justifying the conditions for promoting self-determination and self-realisation of the individual, Ivan Bekh focuses on such principles as

- (a) *the principle of humanising the upbringing process* (focusing the attention of the teacher on the learner's personality as a higher value, taking into account its individual characteristics and capabilities, stimulating the development of a conscious attitude to gender equality, freedom of life choices of each);
- (b) *the principle of subject–subject interaction* (participants in the upbringing process are equal partners, respect each other's views and recognise the right to differences from their own, the teacher must take into account the value system of each learner, show empathy and pedagogical reflection); and
- (c) *the principle of personal orientation* (understanding of unique and peculiar features of the mental development of each individual, cultivating in learners, regardless of gender, a sense of self-worth, self-confidence, giving them the right to feel individuality, directing efforts to the development of worldview, self-awareness, emotional receptivity on the basis of gender equality) (Bekh 2018).

In modern psychological and pedagogical science, personality development is considered in the context of the formation of such attributes of *subjectivity* as

self-activity, self-development, self-determination, self-realisation. Elsewhere (Rastrygina 2004), the first author of this article considers self-development and self-realisation of the individual in the context of the formation of the “capacity for freedom” as the ability to lead a non-conformist existence, adopting an independent, sovereign construction of one’s destiny, relations with the world, the realisation of a self-discovered life purpose and the exercise of one’s own individual choice based on gender identity. Justifying the conditions for the development of personal freedom (the capacity for freedom), she introduces the concept of *individuation* (the development of a single, special, original mode of existence, which is embedded in a given individual by nature, regardless of gender, without which a sense of natural “self” and human dignity are impossible) (*ibid.*). The concept of *personalisation* of pedagogical interaction is no less important in the development of individual freedom in the context of gender equality. The above-mentioned concept requires abandoning gender-role masks and relationships, adopting instead adequate inclusion in the interaction of those elements of personal experience (feelings, experiences, emotions and their corresponding actions and deeds) which testify to the understanding of gender as a social construct.

In view of the above-mentioned scholars’ positions, we believe that the development of learners’ personal freedom in the context of gender as a social construct embedded in social relations implies the fullest possible realisation of the potential opportunities of a developing personality. This requires the maximum enrichment (amplification) of content, forms, methods and types of activities specific to different life stages, which will allow a more complete understanding of social processes related to gender identity and gender social relations and values. This will in turn provide a more complete understanding of the gender dimension.

The creation of this kind of communication relationship between a teacher and a learner must meet three requirements: (1) a congruence of experiences and behaviour; (2) an unconditional positive attitude towards learners (acceptance); and (3) empathy. From the perspective of the teacher, *congruence* means a sincere, frank, direct and conscious manifestation of one’s own feelings, a personal attitude towards learners. Unconditional positive acceptance in the context of pedagogical interaction is understood as a favourable, *interested attitude* of the teacher towards the learner and is expressed in manifestations of sympathy, respect, understanding, protection, support and help, not dependent on any conditions or evaluations. Finally, *empathy* includes feeling and understanding the teacher’s inner state, thoughts and feelings through empathy and partial identification. Thus, productive educational interaction between teacher and learner, where pedagogical communication promotes the development of learners’ personal freedom as a factor in the realisation of gender equality, involves observing the principles of dialogue, problematisation, personalisation and individualisation (Rastrygina 2018). The obvious close relationship of these four principles ensures that the creative potential of both teachers and learners is addressed, stimulates their personal development and contributes to the formation of learners’ personal freedom.

The ideas discussed above allow us to present the four psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of individual inner freedom as a factor in achieving gender equality in educational institutions.

- (1) The first condition refers to *the expansion of the boundaries of learners' awareness* of their physical, mental and spiritual strengths, knowledge of themselves and the surrounding reality from an "equal to equal" position, which involves the satisfaction of their basic needs through favourable social and psychological activities, careful consideration of the individual characteristics of each and every one and providing them with enough space for the manifestation of independence and creativity.
- (2) The second condition is *the development of learners' personal freedom*, regardless of gender, through the humanisation of the pedagogical process and compliance with the four basic principles of humanistic education (dialogisation, problematisation, personalisation and individualisation).
- (3) The third condition requires *the maximum enrichment (amplification)* of the content, forms, methods and types of activities, specified to meet the needs of different age levels, which determine the development of learners' personal freedom in the context of the gender dimension.
- (4) Finally, the fourth condition is the creation of an emotionally comfortable educational environment based on productive upbringing interaction between the teacher and learners, which stimulates the manifestation of the subjective activity of the individual, aimed at the self-development of self-determination and self-realisation of everyone based on the invariant principles of the pedagogy of freedom.

Designing a learning space for free self-determination of the individual

The practical implementation of the above-mentioned conditions requires the design of an appropriate learning environment that stimulates the manifestation of subject activity and free self-determination, self-development and self-realisation of the individual in the context of the issue of gender equality. It should be noted that upbringing focused on the development of personal freedom achieves its goals to the extent that it creates situations that require subjective activity on the part of the individual, the manifestation of their inner forces for self-development and self-affirmation. Ukrainian and foreign experience has repeatedly convinced us that an attempt to form a personality according to a predetermined model, sending learners through a template education system, can only provide educational and social surrogates. Therefore, upbringing focused on the development of personal freedom is not the formation of a personality with given properties, but the creation of conditions for the full manifestation and, accordingly, the development of personal properties and qualities of learners as subjects of their own life choices, regardless of gender.

Personal freedom of everyone is incompatible with submission to external dictates or conformity of the individual themselves. At the same time, it involves the formation of life skills in the contextual field of education and upbringing, where gender is of particular importance, because Ukrainian society today aims to achieve gender equality on the basis of the egalitarian values of the countries of the European community. Therefore, the development of learners' personal freedom is connected with

- (a) self-respect and willingness to respect other people regardless of gender;
- (b) a democratic style of communication regarding the rights, freedoms and opportunities of each person to fully live their life without restrictions related to gender;
- (c) an orientation towards establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships on essential personal and acquired socio-cultural qualities of partners;
- (d) respect for the customs and views of other people; and
- (e) the dialectical unity of mastering socio-cultural norms, and a critical attitude towards simplistic assumptions that formal education and upbringing provided in educational institutions automatically solves gender imbalance in society.

The development of these listed qualities can also be considered as an educational goal of the pedagogy of freedom in the contextual field of the issue of gender identity.

In our opinion, education focused on the development of learners' personal freedom as a factor in the realisation of gender equality requires the design and creation of a special learning space that provides opportunities for free self-determination of the individual and the manifestation of learners' own subjective activity.

The concept of a "learning space" is not clearly defined in pedagogical science. Its interpretation largely depends on the researcher's theoretical position. The difference in views is explained by the multidimensionality of the learning space itself with its natural, social, informational, cultural and educational content. The concept which became the most widespread in pedagogical literature is that of a metaphorical understanding of the learning space, where educational processes are imagined as a set of individual forms of development and a variety of educational opportunities. Most often, the learning space is interpreted as a pedagogically sensible environment that surrounds learners (courtyard, classroom, various primary and secondary education institutions, universities, etc.). But while the environment is fundamentally a natural and social given, it is not the result of constructive social pedagogical activity. A learning space, in our opinion, is the result of creative and integrative activities. In order for it to develop, it is necessary to determine its main components and what should connect them, to include learners' activities in the modelled connections. It is only under these conditions that we can expect a learning space to become a significant factor in personal development. In the opposite case, individual components of the environment will spontaneously influence learners, and not necessarily in a positive way. Obviously, one must be able to use the environment for educational purposes and be able to create this learning space.

We understand a *learning space of free self-determination* as a specially organised pedagogical environment that provides opportunities for the manifestation of various forms of subjective activity of the individual:

- (1) *initiative*, which is manifested in the initiation and deployment of this or that activity without external prompting;
- (2) *volition*, which ensures the mobilisation of learner's resources to overcome perceived objective and subjective obstacles during the activity;

- (3) *creativity*, which is manifested in the solution of tasks for which neither the method of solution nor the possible results are known in advance;
- (4) *supra-situational action*, i.e. going beyond the framework of the activity situation, which is set by the socio-cultural norm or corresponds to the previous experience of the learner; and
- (5) *self-management*, which manifests itself in the conscious management of the individual's capabilities, construction and implementation of life strategies, the organisation of a learner's life path in accordance with the values of an egalitarian society.

The main structural units of the learning space facilitating individual free self-determination modelled by us are the physical environment, social and psychological factors, and the educational programme. Accordingly, the structural model of this space contains three basic components: the spatial-subject, social-psychological and organisational-pedagogical components. The learning space designed for the development of the inner freedom of the individual as a factor in the realisation of gender equality should provide opportunities for meeting basic needs and realisation of personal values of all participants in the pedagogical process, primarily learners. This means the correspondence of the spatial-subject, social-psychological and organisational-pedagogical components of the learning space to the needs and capabilities of learners as subjects of the educational process. The crucial role in the organisation of the "zone of developmental opportunities" is that of the *organisational-pedagogical component*, which is designed to adequately mediate and expediently organise the interaction of the participants of the pedagogical process with the spatial-subject and socio-psychological components of the learning space. Effective functioning of each of these components is only possible under certain conditions.

For the *spatial-subject component*, the required conditions are: heterogeneity and complexity of the environment; interconnection of functional zones; flexibility and manageability of the environment; individualisation of the environment; and authenticity of the environment. For the *socio-psychological component*, what is needed is: mutual understanding and satisfaction with the relations of all participants of the educational process; all participants' positive and optimistic mood; partnership participation of everyone involved in the management of the educational process; and cohesion and consciousness of all participants. Finally, for the *organisational and pedagogical component*, the required conditions are: ensuring everyone's freedom and right to choose in the educational process; recognition of the self-worth of individual learners at any age as a special stage of their life path; dialogisation of the pedagogical space; personalisation of pedagogical relationships; problematisation of the educational process; and individualisation of educational interaction.

A fundamental condition for personal growth is the disclosure of the uniqueness and originality of each learner regardless of gender, and the development of their self-determination and self-regulation competencies in the atmosphere of freedom that is cultivated in the pedagogical environment. Personal freedom is the most important condition for the realisation of gender equality in accordance with the needs and interests of everyone, including the need for communication, self-affirmation and testing one's strengths and creative abilities. Being in an active learning

environment, in which various opportunities for free choice and manifestation of subject activity are created, the individual is directed towards those which at the moment are the most significant for them, adequate to their internal development. Freedom provides opportunities for creative self-disclosure, requires the individual to correlate their needs with the interests and freedom of other people, regardless of gender. And in this way, it provides conditions for the development of positive negative freedom (Novotna 2021) of the individual regarding non-interference in the formation of their responsibility and self-regulation, their awareness of the relationship with the realities of life and the legal and moral realities of an egalitarian society.

The effective functioning of the learning space of individual free self-determination as a factor of gender equality requires a special type of pedagogical activity that supports the development of learners' full potential. This, in turn, places particular demands on educators capable of solving these tasks. A decisive role is played by their personal and professional position, which allows them to work towards implementing the pedagogy of freedom. The main constituent components of such a position are perception of the learner's personality as a value regardless of gender; a positive self-concept of the educator; and orientation towards the invariant principles of pedagogy of freedom.

Conclusion and recommendations for further research

After highlighting problems related to gender issues in the field of education, and reviewing relevant work of leading Ukrainian and foreign scholars, we established that Ukrainian education, as a flagship of the democratisation of society on the basis of the equality of all, still remains insufficiently mobile and sensitive to the need for real practical changes according to current needs. The purpose of this article was to provide an analysis of the existing state of gender equality in the Ukrainian education system and to present, based on our concept of the pedagogy of freedom, ways of developing learners' personal freedom as a decisive factor in achieving gender equality in the learning space of educational institutions.

Gender education as a conceptual idea of modern educational theory and practice needs to expand the boundaries of academic research. This includes its educational component, which corresponds to the concept of pedagogy of freedom as a model that ensures the development of learners' personal freedom, the formation of their subjective activity for self-development, self-expression and self-realisation regardless of gender. Our critical analysis of relevant academic literature of the 2000s demonstrated that many Ukrainian scholars see the mission of the gender approach in expanding the opportunities of the educational space for the manifestation of personal freedom and self-realisation of each individual based on the principles of gender equality and improving educational process of learners on equal partnership. We established that over the past decade, Ukrainian researchers gained some theoretical and methodological experience in introducing the gender component into the educational sector. However, this process requires further fundamental academic development and a deeper understanding of many urgent tasks to overcome the gap between theoretical developments and practical needs.

Our study of the issue of gender equality in today's educational policy and the academic work of modern scholars shows the main message that there is an urgent need for a deeper study of various factors that contribute to the elimination of problems related to gender equality. In particular, the factor of how to create an appropriate learning environment and related issues have not yet been studied. This finding confirmed our notion that solving the problem of gender (in)equality in Ukraine's education system requires a change in perspective, and in particular, in its upbringing segment.

In view of the confirmed need for the development of further, more in-depth research into the gender phenomenon, CUSPU, the university where we both teach, has been conducting relevant large-scale work in recent years. This includes exploring European values and experience in promoting the issue of gender equality in higher education, also in the context of the formation of the New Ukrainian School. This research is being carried out in cooperation with a number of European programmes and, in particular, within the framework of the implementation of the international project "Subnational gender equality: Balancing EU values and Ukrainian realities" under the EU Erasmus+ programme (ISCAR 2022). As participants of this project, we will ourselves introduce a new module within the framework of the existing course "Pedagogy of freedom in the paradigmatic space of modern education and upbringing". This module will address the development of gender equality in the learning space of higher education institutions, to further explore and verify the effectiveness of the ways of solving the problem of gender (in)equality proposed in this article.

Applying the concept of the pedagogy of freedom, based on the development of learners' personal freedom, ensures the creation of a gender-comfortable educational environment in the learning space of educational institutions, which enables the manifestation of the individuality of everyone regardless of gender. In the context of presenting the pedagogy of freedom as a conceptual basis for the implementation of gender equality in the Ukrainian education system, we also analysed the academic work of researchers devoted to issues of freedom and gender equality in educational policy. For a deeper understanding of the correlation between the categories of freedom and gender equality, we considered the philosophical aspect of the historically rooted dichotomy of the concepts of negative freedom (freedom from) and positive freedom (freedom for) (Berlin 2005). In the context of gender (in)equality, this dichotomy correlates with the conceptualisation of freedom of the humanistic model, in accordance with the concept of positive negative freedom (Novotna 2021).

In the process of developing personal freedom, the idea of individual self-development, self-determination and self-realisation becomes important. Thanks to their own subjective activity, individuals acquire the ability to reveal their individuality, activate creative potential and abilities, and thereby assert their freedom and values aimed at achieving an "equal–equal" attitude to the freedom of others. That is why gender differences between individuals can in no way limit the free development and self-realisation of an individual.

The methodological basis of the development of personal freedom as a factor in the realisation of gender equality is a polyparadigmatic approach which combines a number of academic angles (systemic, synergistic, cultural, personality-oriented,

axiological). Our choice of this methodology confirmed the need to create a fundamentally new model built on the invariant principles of the pedagogy of freedom, as a concept that facilitates the free personal development of upcoming generations and, in that context, is truly capable of providing adequate gender education and upbringing.

We defined five invariant principles (the principle of self-worth of the individual; the principle of the absolute value of each stage of human life; the principle of the naturalness of upbringing; the principle of freedom; and the principle of harmonising the effects of the social and educational upbringing environment) which form the basis of the development of personal freedom. These principles enabled us to single out the provisions common to all of them, that is, an invariant core that forms the conceptual basis of the pedagogy of freedom. In the context of the above-mentioned methodology and principles of the development of learners' personal freedom, we presented our interpretation of the pedagogy of freedom as a special direction of humanistic pedagogy which examines the theoretical and practical foundations of the development of the inner freedom of the individual based on the egalitarian values of a democratic society.

From the standpoint of the pedagogy of freedom, the result of achieving gender equality in a modern democratic society should be an internally free person, independent of gender prejudices and ready for self-determination in life. Given the basic foundations of the pedagogy of freedom and gender theory, such a personality is characterised by a number of features we have presented in this article. We have proposed ways of effective implementation of gender equality measures based on the concept of the pedagogy of freedom. In particular, we have outlined the psychological and pedagogical conditions conducive to the development of personal freedom as a factor in achieving gender equality in educational institutions. The practical implementation of the above-mentioned conditions requires the design of an appropriate learning environment which stimulates the manifestation of subject activity and free self-determination, self-development and self-realisation of the individual in the context of the issue of gender equality.

Our understanding of the educational space of free self-determination is that of a specially organised pedagogical environment which provides opportunities for the manifestation of various forms of subject activity of the individual (initiative, volition, creativity, supra-situational action, self-management). We have presented a structural model of the learning space of free self-determination, which contains three basic components (the spatial-subject, social-psychological, and organisational-pedagogical components). The crucial role in the organisation of the "zone of developmental opportunities" is that of the organisational-pedagogical component. The fundamental condition for learners' personal growth is the atmosphere of freedom which is cultivated in the pedagogical environment. Personal freedom is the most important condition for the realisation of gender equality according to the needs and interests of everyone, including the need for communication, self-affirmation, testing one's strengths and creative abilities. The effective functioning of the learning space conducive to individual free self-determination as a factor of gender equality requires a special type of pedagogical activity that supports the development of learners' subjective activity.

The research we have presented here does not cover all aspects of addressing the issue of personal freedom as a factor in the implementation of gender equality in the education system. In the near future, it would be interesting to review the results of the implementation of the proposed pedagogy of freedom in terms of its effectiveness in the realisation of gender equality in the educational space of higher and secondary education institutions. In the longer term, aspects such as the phenomenon of gender identity as a more complex continuum, which recognises different types of identity and connection with gender, need further academic research.

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