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## PHILOSOPHICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF ROOT CAUSES OF DEGRADATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEM IN UKRAINE

*The **relevance** of the study is driven by the need to urgently enhance the state of the educational system of Ukraine through identifying the causes of its degradation. Thus, the article examines the main causes of the degradation of the education system in Ukraine and outlines the current developments in the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic, which are further complicated by the ongoing Russian aggression towards Ukraine. The **purpose** of the study is to determine the primary causes of the degradation of the education system in Ukraine. The research **objectives** are to revise the philosophical understanding of trends in education system and to provide recommendations for improving the situation with the education system. To reach the objectives the **methods** of systemic analysis, observation and structural and logical method were used. The **results** of the analysis and observation revealed that traditional educational systems seem to be undergoing a crisis to some extent in all countries of the world. It was determined that the criteria of the degradation of education are vague understanding of the spiritual foundations of education, a decrease in public interests regarding the level and quality of education, increasing disrespect to educators both as a mentor and as a financially stable profession, students' poor knowledge of natural and technical disciplines. One of the key levers for overcoming the crisis is considered to be a thorough rethinking of education as a social phenomenon, a social institution and a social system. The existing internal contradictions in the development of social systems, globalization processes, thoughtless borrowing of foreign experience and abandonment of domestic one, inability to respond flexibly to the challenges of the social environment are seen as primary causes for the degradation.*

**Key words:** root causes, education, lifelong learning, education system, degradation, Covid-19.

**Introduction.** Education is one of the fundamental human rights, which is enshrined in Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights, the Constitution of Ukraine and other industry laws. Education is a continuous process that involves constant learning, retraining and self-improvement throughout life. "Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities

for all” [27] is the fourth UN Sustainable Development Goal 2030, which is also implemented into the education strategy of Ukraine.

The origin of root causes and contradictions of various issues has been the focus of thinkers of different countries for many centuries. Highlighting the root causes has prompted researchers to develop holistic philosophical systems and the necessary methodological tools for studying social phenomena and processes.

Even Aristotle believed that people should be prepared for life as much as possible: it is essential to give help to each individual in order to develop the abilities necessary to solve the tasks at hand. M. Montaigne argued that it is impossible to effectively acquire ready-made truths, especially if learners cannot judge their validity a priori. Education is meant to help students perceive the world critically, and based on such observations make independent judgments, which will determine an adequate perception of reality, and serve to improve the quality of life.

The German philosopher G. Hegel claimed that “a contradiction moves the world”, it contains “the root of all vitality and pulsation”, and it is “the source of all motion” [3, p. 280]. The substantiation of the position that the source of motion is embedded in the subject itself contradicted the central category of dialectics (in contrast to the metaphysical concept of development, in which the source of motion is an external impulse – certain circumstances or conditions).

The American philosopher D. Dewey insisted on the need for educational practice based on philosophical principles, justifying the idea that educators should use philosophy as the methodological ground for all educational activities, and philosophy of education should become an indispensable dimension of competent, responsible activities in education.

Thus, it is no coincidence that the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy (Boston, USA, 1998) chose the ancient Greek system of upbringing – “Paideia” – as its main discussion topic. “Paideia” meant a harmonious bodily and spiritual formation of a young person, which promotes the possibility of full development of all their abilities. The content of such harmony is provided by “kalokagathia” – a set of educational activities that contribute to the formation of aesthetic and ethical virtues in the individual, determining the perfection of a person’s bodily and spiritual essence. However, the implementation of the “paideia” principle at the level of educational and social praxis is not the only attempt to use ancient wisdom to solve current problems. The modern philosophical theoretical thesaurus has seen a return to active use of such notions as “agona” as a peaceful competitiveness, “synergy” as interaction and interdependence, the Platonic understanding of “the other” as not merely “worse” or “better” but “qualitatively different”, the Socratic “maieutic” and “dialogics” as a prolific way of searching for truth, “discourse” as a meaningful fragment of oral or written speech that reflects the social, cognitive and rhetorical practices of a particular group, etc [16, p. 58–59]. All this confirms the need for a philosophical understanding of the primary causes for the degradation of the education system. Thus, the **purpose** of this study is to determine the primary causes of the degradation of the education system in Ukraine. The **objectives**, therefore, are to update the philosophical understanding of trends in education system and to provide recommendations for improving the situation with the education system.

The **methods** used to reach the objectives are the method of systemic analysis, observation and structural and logical method.

**Results.** Education is understood as a single process of physical and spiritual development of a personality, the process of socialization, consciously oriented to some ideal images, to social standards historically recorded in public consciousness (for example, a Spartan warrior, a virtuous Christian, an energetic entrepreneur, a harmoniously developed person). In this sense, education appears as an indispensable aspect of the lives of all communities and all individuals without exception.

Viewed as a result of knowledge accumulation and training process, education has both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The first aspect is manifested in the quantitative amount of knowledge acquired and assimilated by a person; the level of education (secondary or higher education) may serve as its formalized indicator. In addition, education is a source of high moral value, the formation of abilities and aspirations that determine the historical destiny of a man and a nation [16, p. 13]. Thus, L. Huberskyi, M. Mykhalchenko and V. Andruschenko argue that education belongs to one

of those institutions, the quality and level of development of which determines the progress of both the humanity as a whole and the individual in particular [4].

In this respect, the statement of T. Parsons [11] is also worth mentioning as he states that education as a social system can be defined by four functions: reproduction of social behavior patterns, adaptation to new social conditions, achievement of goals, and system integration. As one of the social institutions in the system of social labor division, education is focused on two specific tasks: 1) transformation of social and cultural experience into an asset of all its members to the extent that they need it for having a full life; 2) shaping of the individual's ability to enrich the cumulative experience through their own contribution.

Education is an important strategic resource for the formation of a self-sufficient personality, ensuring national interests, creating a positive image of the state in the international arena. It should be noted that being transformed into an integral system of educational structures, relations and activities, education performs the function of reproducing and developing the intellectual potential of the planetary (global) society at all levels of management [18].

The development of the education system is influenced by many factors [10, p. 22]:

1. Globalization of education: development of international projects and relations in the field of education, academic mobility.
2. The level of development of social production and improvement of its scientific and technical base.
3. Information and communication technologies and the introduction of artificial intelligence systems.
4. Social class relations and property differentiation.
5. Historical experience and national peculiarities in the field of education.
6. Development of innovative pedagogical practices, popularization of innovations in the educational environment.
7. Social activity of business and the degree of involvement of civil society institutions.

Answering the question about the kind of education necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, UNESCO identified four "pillars of education" [17, p. 224]:

- learning to learn and use knowledge, i.e. to acquire a lifelong education, to work thoroughly in their narrow field with sufficiently broad general knowledge;
- learning to do things not only using standard skills, but, more broadly, learning to cope with different situations and work in a team as part of both formal and informal social experience;
- learning to live together, developing and understanding other people and their aspirations for independence (by implementing joint projects and learning to resolve conflicts), strengthening pluralism, mutual understanding and peace;
- learning to be, that is to develop to a greater extent their personal qualities and ability to act with greater independence, guided by their own discretion and personal responsibility. Education should not ignore any aspect of human potential, whether it is memory, intelligence, a sense of beauty, physical ability or communication skills.

The difficult situation in the state of the domestic education system, caused by the need for reforms towards integration into the global community, is further complicated by the challenges and problems posed by the impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and an ongoing Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Some possible ways to comprehensively address these challenges have been already proposed by such international organizations as the United Nations [24], UNESCO [21], the Organization for Security and Development of Europe [25], and the World Bank [28]. Responding to the current effects of coronavirus pandemic on the transformation of education, Polish researchers presented recommendations in "Education in times of the Covid-19 pandemic: Keeping distance about what we are currently doing as teachers" [22] which can be adapted to the peculiarities of certain countries. And the research works of Stukalo [26] and Donelly [20] present the analysis and assessment of how such challenges and problems have affected the education system in Ukraine as well as provide a number of recommendations.

The rapid changes taking place in the society, technology and knowledge will require future specialists to be able to adapt, to master new skills, professions, and creativity. The acquisition of universal competencies is most relevant in the future structures of educational programs: the ability to learn, process information, to master new technologies quickly, the ability to think critically and to approach tasks creatively. The skills of systems thinking, programming, interdisciplinary communication, the ability to work in conditions of uncertainty, multiculturalism and multilingualism, environmental thinking, multifunctionality are also becoming of importance. The high complexity of the tasks of the future requires specialists to be able to concentrate, manage their own emotions, maintain mental and physical performance, and plan their workload [15].

The new educational paradigm is defined as the concept of continuing learning, lifelong learning, “comprehensive education”, “targeted learning”. The main idea of lifelong learning is that each person is individual and strives for self-development and self-actualization. A person’s cognitive needs are endless, and to meet these needs they can study either in any educational institutions or independently, they can be involved in various educational programs, can create a strategy for the development of their own development [2, p. 122].

The mission of continuing education is to develop, improve and restore the personality (in the period of aging), social adaptation at all age stages in changing living conditions, satisfaction of its cognitive needs and formation of competencies in various spheres of social life. To realize this mission, the subject must be self-efficient, act like a subject of their own development. The purpose of formal education is to provide a person with the necessary knowledge and competencies to master the future professional activities, the development of cognitive interests, skills of self-organization and self-management of their own development. Non-formal education is aimed at improving practical competencies and acquiring knowledge and skills for effective self-realization of the individual in various spheres of life. Informal education contributes to the development of self-learning and self-management skills. All areas of education (formal, non-formal and informal) create conditions for developing educational self-efficacy of the individual [2, p. 134].

Due to objective and subjective reasons, the issue of degradation of social systems and personality is arising more and more often. The term “degradation” is used when speaking about the gradual deterioration, decline, loss of valuable qualities and properties observed in different spheres of life – culture, education, art, and environment. This term is also applied to physical, chemical and biological processes.

Degradation of educational means a total decrease in the value of education and its reduction to the level of a service. To our mind, the criteria for the degradation of education are: 1) blurring of the spiritual foundations of education; 2) decrease in respect for the teacher and mentor; 3) low social and financial position of pedagogical and scientific-pedagogical employees; 4) decrease of public interest in the level and quality of education; 5) decline in the overall level of knowledge of students in natural and technical disciplines; 6) disharmonious combination of traditional and postmodern educational technologies; 7) strengthening of internal contradictions in the education system.

The conflict between the need for the education system and the uselessness of the knowledge it provides, leads to a number of contradictions of internal and external nature.

First, students’ lack of complex multifunctional and interdisciplinary knowledge can be traced back to the stage of receiving secondary education, which, on the whole, has significantly lost its qualitative characteristics and cannot sufficiently meet the requirements of higher education, especially regarding the natural sciences. There is an even bigger gap between the basic and second levels of higher education systems. Enrollment of students for the latter is very often performed regardless of the student’s basic education background.

Secondly, the initially poor students’ training is exacerbated by ill-considered curricula and inadequate content of training courses that are not focused on the needs of the labor market and society.

Thirdly, a significant problem in higher education is the almost complete “disconnection” from the advanced science of the intellectual potential of the whole army of qualified university teachers,

who, in addition to their excessive classroom workload, are also responsible for drafting various plans, reports, programs, resolutions, standards and other bureaucratic work. Since most university teachers are not interested much in science, only a few are actively engaged in research work which is potentially useful for the society, and they often do it on their own initiative. At the same time, such activities are not particularly encouraged or stimulated by the university, which is oriented to and motivated by quasi-market conditions of functioning mainly on replenishment of the budget by “earnings” using a study-for-fee form of education [7].

Nowadays Ukraine goes through a crisis in the education system, associated with the emergence of a new stage in the development of civilization – the development of the global information society. The domestic system of higher education meets neither WTO standards nor the criteria for preparing an individual for the information society. The task of the Ukrainian education system is to provide the population of the country with access to quality education as soon as possible. High requirements for the quality of education hinder the necessary pace of building the educational potential of the population in the traditional academic system, especially in the areas of our country which are remote from the university centers [17, p. 28].

It should be taken into account that only education along with the human capital formed and developed by it can and should ensure rapid, sustainable and inclusive growth in Ukraine. However, according to the World Bank Group, the share of the human capital formed and developed by education in the national wealth remains insignificant.

Although Ukraine has managed to maintain many of its comparative advantages in the quality of education since independence, which contribute to high levels of education and human capital development, the new skills required by growing sectors of the national economy differ from those that the education system is developing today and the necessary changes are being implemented slowly. And this happens at the time when, according to recent estimates of the national wealth of 141 countries, in Ukraine human capital accounts for only 34 % of total national wealth. For comparison, in a number of countries with lower than average income levels, the share of human capital in national wealth reaches 51 %, and in the region of Europe and Central Asia (ECA) it makes up 62 %. Consequently, despite high levels of education, in Ukraine the role of human capital as a factor of production and the driving force of economic growth remains relatively weak. At the same time, teaching and learning in higher educational institutions is still focused on acquiring knowledge, the content of which is often outdated, unadjusted to the needs of modern students and doesn't take into account new trends, research or technology development. Despite the fact that the amount of systematized information about the quality of learning in higher education is small, the general opinion is that the curricula and pedagogical teaching methods require modernization in accordance with the evolution of the needs of society and economy [8; 15].

Breaking the systemic ties between the humanities, natural-science, technical and technological components of the education levels leads to the depletion of spiritual values, political, legal and moral nihilism, historical amnesia, impoverishment of the humanitarian potential of science and production, the decline in creative abilities and deterioration of personal culture.

The negative trends in the domestic education system demonstrated above are exacerbated by the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis factor that led to the shutdown of educational institutions in 20 countries and preschools in 19 countries in Europe and Central Asia, which had a significant impact on 49.8 million children of preschool and secondary school age due to disruption or complete absence of the educational process during the past year. The pandemic has significantly exacerbated educational and social inequalities in the regions. Children from low-income families, children living in rural areas with poor infrastructure, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, children with disabilities, migrant and refugee children, children in conflict with the law, children and young people who do not attend school, as well as children in difficult life circumstances or from families where violence is used, and had faced considerable barriers to participation in education and training and showed lower learning and social outcomes than their peers even before the pandemic. An educational establishment is a place not only for acquiring knowledge, but also for

socio-emotional learning, social interaction, and social support. Thus, the closure of schools led not only to disruption of the educational process, but also to the loss of children's access to school meals, maintenance of their well-being and possibility to receive basic health and social services. Teachers, school leaders, educators, and policymakers at the local and national levels have faced a significant challenge. Failure to respond to this challenge will have an impact on the future lives of children, young people, families, communities and society, both socially and economically. Therefore, increasing the sustainability of the education system through targeted planning to provide the most marginalized children with quality comprehensive education should be a priority in the coming years and the main principle of recovering an enhanced educational process and educational establishments [19].

It is worth noting that, the third International Day of Education was dedicated to recovering and revitalizing education in the context of future post-Covid-19 generations [24]. The report highlighted the following problems:

1) while the pandemic has affected over a billion students in almost 200 countries due to the closure of educational institutions, educational area had seen a limited effect from the governmental measures introduced to stimulate national economies;

2) an already existing digital divide exacerbated even further with about 35 percent of students worldwide being unable to access any kind of learning during the first months of compulsory staying home.

3) according to a worldwide survey of member organizations of the Education International affiliates, the majority of educators were not ready for distance learning as they had little or no digital training prior to the pandemic, they either didn't know what digital educational technologies to use or which were recommended as most effective [24].

The transfer of the educational process to the use of technologies and means of distance learning led to a deep destruction of social ties and a downward trend in awareness of the value of education. Recent discoveries in neurology confirm how much we influence each other at the level of the physiology of our brain. Mirror mechanisms discovered in the last decade of the twentieth century, the theory of embodied reason and the understanding of language as a specific type of mirror mechanisms – all point to the fundamental need of a person to be among other people and to have active interaction with them. We seek companionship and friendship, we must do it and we do it automatically, because it is social interaction that gave man an advantage over other species [22, p. 23].

Unfortunately, we are now in a situation where the degradation of domestic education has reached the point of irreversibility. Following the example of Americans, we need to finally face the truth and say frankly: the nation is in danger (an example is the 1983 report entitled “A Nation at Risk”, which was prepared on behalf of President Ronald Reagan by a special commission in the United States) [23].

In our opinion, the main challenges or threats that destroy the basic foundations of education at present are:

1) atomization of social life and violation of the laws of unity of nature, society and man;

2) blurring of the spiritual basis of society, moral and spiritual nihilism;

3) reducing the social prestige of the teaching profession;

4) uncontrolled spread of mass culture (McDonaldization of education) and departure from live communication to primitive virtual one;

5) focus on the provision of educational services (quite often of questionable quality), etc.

We are deeply convinced that education and the process of its provision in general cannot be considered a “service”, although it is personal in nature and is aimed primarily at a specific consumer – a pupil or a student.

After all, since its inception, the system of compulsory education has performed a variety of functions and should have been attributed not to the means of “services distribution”, but to the national wealth as a specific public good. No wonder Professor V. P. Andrushchenko claims that “Education in Ukraine is going through difficult but also very interesting times. It is on the threshold of the twenty-first century, and will enter it the way we – teachers, educators and government officials, or scholars

and cultural figures, entrepreneurs and bankers, parents and children – make it. Raising education is a matter of honor for every citizen of the country. Education is the prestige of the state, an indicator of the development of a nation's culture, it is a fundamental reserve for approaching a decent future of man" [1, p. 350], emphasizing its importance for modern society.

It is essential to remark that most of the lower levels of the hierarchy of the national educational system are still dominated by the self-sacrifice of the teaching staff, their altruism, spirituality, and commitment to the principles of humanism, tolerance, and responsibility (or rather, it should be so, and it often is like this, though not always). It is quite obvious that the upbringing of decent people on the basis of mercantilism, pettiness, selfishness and an attempt to achieve their own benefit in all cases and under all circumstances is very unlikely [6, p. 31–32].

We would like to note that the formation of mind, intellect and spirit are combined in man, derive from each other, nourish each other and flow out of each other. As a person develops, they discover their basic natural value – spirituality, whose integral component – the mind, is designed to reconcile human activities with nature. To perform such a function requires a perfect thinking tool. An individual with an underdeveloped intellect is unable to harmonize their needs with nature. If it becomes a matrix for the formation of society, then on a large scale it appears as an ecological catastrophe of inconsistency of society with the laws of nature. However paradoxical, it remains a fact that promotion of the Bologna process gradually eliminated humanization as a priority in the development of national education. After all, it is not surprising that in the educational space, which prepares a unified workforce with the appropriate level of qualification for the European economy, the humanities are objectively marginalized. Nonetheless, such an approach to education contradicts the foundations of the European model of democracy, in which the highest value is given to the individual. It is the humanization of education that sets such an orientation in the shaping of professional culture of a specialist [16, p. 58–59].

An important flaw in the belief system, which has extremely negative praxeological consequences, is that society often views education as a social institution (at the societal level) and a type of activity (at the individual level) in an extremely one-sided way and is reduced only to a means of preparing the individual for a profession. This is obviously a simplistic approach, since the purpose of education lies not only and not so much in training and not even in preparing a person for life in general, but in helping the individual to improve both the world and themselves in this world. Thus, one of the key levers for overcoming the crisis of education is the conceptual rethinking of education as a social phenomenon, social institution and social system [16, p. 175].

The essence of the necessary changes in education, their goals, directions and methods should be regularly explained to the population, and the results of public opinion should be carefully studied, analyzed and used by educational authorities and heads of educational institutions while conducting targeted modification of domestic education rather than just modernization.

According to the research group from the International Bureau of Education led by H. C. Tedesco, the movement towards democracy and decentralization in the educational sphere devalues the experience of education reforms accumulated over the centuries and forces to seek new approaches to reforms. The main innovation is the need to turn to the democratic-legislative model, the implementation success of which is not spontaneous, it is time-consuming, involves the public and legislators, the use of experiments of limited scope with further spread of the revised plan to the rest of the educational space [12, p. 138].

Therefore, it is quite advisable and necessary to turn to the development of new educational programs that will contribute to updating the content of training of management personnel to work in conditions of democratic governance of education. At the same time, the education system requires broad public support, responsibility and an active role of the state in this area, deep and comprehensive modernization of education with the allocation of necessary resources and the creation of innovative mechanisms for public administration in Ukraine.

This will make it possible to continue the implementation of the reform of the education sector, which began in 2014, including the "New Ukrainian School" Initiative (NUSH) in general secondary

education, and to reform higher education in accordance with the European Higher Education Area standards, as well as help higher education institutions overcome the consequences of COVID-19, to develop more sustainable and flexible approaches for future activities [14; 15].

Given the many areas of necessary changes in the educational system, we must recognize that this process should by no means be reduced to the introduction of inessential services and supplementary tools, to a new grading scale, squeezing of material into “modules” or “blocks”, ranking universities and teachers, testing pupils and students, etc., without changing the relationship in a typical educational pair “teacher – student”.

V. Petrenko states that considering the times of Knowledge Economy, the above-mentioned tasks can have a radical and complex solution thanks to the process of intellectualization of the management of the national education system, grounded on the “intellectualized society – intellectualized management” paradigm [13, p. 35]. In the educational sphere of Ukraine the use of this paradigm, which has already received theoretical and practical development in business management (as shown in [9]), will attract and activate the intellectual potential of a significant part of the participants: scientific and pedagogical staff and students of all categories, the intellectual potential which has not been used in the management of the system until recently.

In fact, justified by these studies, the minimization of the use of “subject-object” relationship, which is traditional for the domestic educational system, and transition to “subject-subject” relationship, can ensure the exclusion of any elements of order-subordination, instruction-execution, requirements-implementation from the classical mechanisms of knowledge relaying accumulated by past generations as unproductive and inefficient methods of interaction of the components of the triad “administrator-teacher-student” and replace them by the joint intellectual activity of all three components in the processes of collecting, accumulating, processing, analyzing and evaluating significant amounts of knowledge with the further generation of new intellectual products – theoretical and applied knowledge and products of their use in all areas of practical activity [5]. Only such interaction of the components will allow the participants of the scientific and educational process to effectively and jointly search for the truth on the basis of Socratic “maieutic” and “dialogics” by uniting efforts (“synergy”) in conditions of peaceful competitiveness (“agona”), etc.

**Conclusions.** Thus, the root causes of the degradation of the education system are existing internal contradictions in the development of social systems (social and property inequality, high level of bureaucracy and inertia), globalization processes, ill-considered borrowings of foreign experience and rejection of domestic one, inability to respond flexibly to the challenges of social environment.

The other equally important reasons for the degradation of education are social, moral and ethical causes, professional aging of teachers, the drop in students’ interest in learning, the spread of various forms of pseudo-education, the destructive influence of social media on the thinking of participants. These processes have become especially noticeable in the conditions of quarantine restrictions due to the spread of coronavirus infection. As a result, there is a global decline in the quality of education, de-socialization, de-intellectualization, and various forms of escaping from reality. Mankind is entering an era of “new digital barbarism”, which is causing increasing concern in the intellectual environment.

Therefore, there is a need to return to the humanization of education, deep spiritual learning, the introduction of flexible educational technologies, intellectualization of education management. The need for humanization of the educational sphere is also relevant in view of the postmodern labyrinths of meaning, in which the subject navigation is possible only with a critical worldview. In this context, the humanitarian component of education as an important factor in socio-cultural transformations needs to be thoroughly reconsidered. It should not be just an individual who is in the center of education, but it should be a person capable of self-learning, self-creation, and self-cognition. Education should provide conditions for adequate understanding of reality, determination of successful life strategies, formation of creative thinking, ways of communication, practical actions and human behavior.



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