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## STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AT UNIVERSITY

*The article highlights the problems associated with the concept of involving students in the formation, development and implementation of vital decisions in the field of higher education. It is emphasized that the relevance of student participation is that students are not only a stakeholder but also an equal partner in the processes of university governance and in the process of ensuring the quality of higher education. The article analyses different approaches to the concept of «student voice». The authors propose to consider this concept as a philosophical and managerial idea that students have their unique opinion on education and they should be able to make a real contribution to decision-making in higher education, influencing results, expressing their views, promoting their ideas and feeling the results of their influence. Different models and mechanisms of student voice are presented: representation of students in the governing bodies of the university; activities of students in leading groups of educational programs; survey of students, focus groups; cooperation with the students' organization; regular informal discussions between students and faculty and university management. The article analyses the practical implementation of different models and mechanisms of student voice in European universities: University College London and University of Helsinki, and reviews the impact of student voice on educational practice in Ukrainian higher education institutions on the example of the National Technical University of Ukraine «Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Igor Sikorsky». It is concluded that in Ukrainian universities, compared to European ones, the concept of cooperation with students as full partners in every aspect of their education has not yet found practical implementation; forms of students' influence more often relate to socio-cultural and sports areas, organization of leisure and entertainment.*

**Keywords:** feedback; higher education; higher education quality; students; student voice; student participation in university.

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**Introduction.** The concept of involving students in the processes of formation and implementation of vital decisions in the field of education, ensuring the quality of higher education is becoming increasingly important in the context of higher education reform. At the institutional level, this idea is embodied in the concept of student voice, which is quite common in the practices of European universities and is just beginning to become crucial for Ukrainian higher education institutions.

The importance and involvement of the student community in improving education is a relevant topic being discussed by the scientific community

around the world. One of the basic principles of good governance in higher education is the concept of shared governance. This principle requires the representation of various stakeholders in decision-making processes in the universities. The authors' vision of the relevance of student participation is that students are not only a stakeholder but also equal partners in university governance processes. The established culture of partnership between students and other stakeholders at the university allows the university as an institution to respond more effectively to the modern challenges and complement its strategies in the context of the competitiveness of the institution.

According to the authors, the starting point for

understanding the concept of student voice is the belief that the universal principle of the University as a social system is participatory democracy and broad social participation, embodied in the conscious, active participation of all stakeholders and especially students as the largest stakeholder in the processes of formation, development and implementation of all important decisions at the university.

In «The Glossary of education reform for journalists, parents, and community members» (2013) the voice is defined as both a philosophical stance and a school-improvement strategy. Understanding of the term «voice» is based on the belief or recognition that an educational institution will be more successful if the management of the educational institution takes into account the values, opinions, beliefs and views of all stakeholders. Thus, the authors consider voice as an alternative to more hierarchical forms of management, in which the administration of educational institutions can make unilateral executive decisions almost without the participation of students, teachers and parents.

**The aim of the article** is the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of «student voice» as an essential mechanism for ensuring the quality of education, as well as an analysis of models and mechanisms of student voice in comparison with foreign and Ukrainian universities.

**Research methods.** The article uses theoretical analysis of scientific sources to investigate the phenomenon of student voice; methods of analysis and systematization of information presented on the websites of universities in Great Britain, Finland and Ukraine; the comparative method for determining the similarities and differences of models of student voice involvement in university governance in domestic and foreign higher education institutions. The study is based on the experience of University College London, University of Helsinki, as well as the National Technical University of Ukraine «Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Igor Sikorsky» to develop partnerships with students, presented on the official websites of these universities.

**Research Results.** Student voice is a concept and a set of approaches that position students alongside credentialed educators as critics and creators of educational practice (Cook-Sather, 2020, p. 182). Student voice refers to the values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of individual students and groups of students in a school, and to instructional approaches and techniques that are based on student choices, interests, passions, and ambitions (The Glossary of Education Reform for journalists, parents, and community members, 2013).

Traditionally, in the understanding of the concept of student voice there are two aspects. First, it is the participation of young students in governance processes, university policy-making, decision-making, starting from strategic areas and ending with the choice of teaching methods for a particular educational program.

«Student voice is giving students the ability to

influence learning to include policies, programs, contexts and principles» (Harper, 2000). As A. Fletcher (2014) concludes, student voice is «any expression of any learner about anything, anywhere, anytime related to learning, schools or education» (p. 2).

The second approach, developed in the practical educational activities of universities, as noted by H. Young & L. Jerome (2020), reduces the understanding of student voice to a cycle of feedbacks. According to this approach, students express their opinions on specific educational issues, the university accepts them, reacts in a certain way, then, closing the circle, reports to students about the reaction to their feedback (p. 688).

Thus, as summarized by L. Templeton and others (2019), the definition of student voice has two main components. First, student voice means students feel they have agency in their ability to participate in institutional decision making. Second, institutions make efforts to listen to the student voice, so that voices are not just spoken but heard, considered, and incorporated into decisions.

Involving students in university life is defined by researchers as an essential element of neoliberal higher education around the world (H. Young & L. Jerome, 2020; E. Nelson & J. Charteris, 2020); the student voice contributes to the development of democratic trends and the development of social capital of graduates with leadership skills as valuable preparation for citizenship in a democratic society (L. Lyons & M. Brasof, 2020; J. Tyrrell & V. Sally, 2015); it is a mean of ensuring the quality of education and one of the requirements of educational benchmarking (V. J. Hall, 2020).

However, there are also precautionary approaches to the student voice. Such is, for example, the article of A. B. Mendes & D. Hammett (2020) with the eloquent title «The new tyranny of student participation? Student voice and the paradox of strategically-active student-citizen». The authors used the argumentation of the scientific and practical work of B. Cooke & U. Kothari (2001) «Participation: The New Tyranny?». That the participation of broad sectors of the population in governing the state does not function as an instrument of liberation and separation of powers but instead supports the existing power relations, however, it masks it with rhetoric and techniques of participation. A. B. Mendes & D. Hammett projected these findings on the field of higher education and asked the question: has not the student voice become a new tyranny of participation?

Another precaution concerns the neoliberal policy of commercialization of higher education, which views the student as a consumer of educational services. A. McCulloch (2009) argues that «the notion of consumerism is directly contrary to any movement towards student engagement, the consumer status engenders passivity in students. They expect a degree of service that attends to their needs and requires a relatively modest personal investment» (p. 171).

R. Williams (2008) warns of a large number of

student surveys «for the sake of surveys», i.e. those that are conducted to obtain feedback from students, not intending to take action accordingly. Students need to know what role they play in institutional policy (p. 3).

J. Tyrrell & S. Varnham describe the different models and mechanisms of the student voice, noting that there is no one, the most effective model; each university uses the most acceptable one for itself (pp. 32–36):

- representation of students in the governing bodies of the university – the University Council, institute, faculty;
- activity of students in leading groups of educational programs, discussion of processes of development and realization of educational programs;
- survey of students, focus groups;
- cooperation with a strong and well-funded independent student organization;
- regular informal discussions between students and faculty and university management (in the framework of teaching, mentoring, support or individual meetings).

In conclusion, the authors note that student voice is a general philosophical and managerial concept, which is based on the recognition that students have their unique view of education and should be able to contribute to the development of education and be involved in decision-making processes, expressing their views, influencing the results and promoting their ideas.

**Student voice: university experience.** To illustrate the concept of student voice in practice, the authors propose to consider the experience of two European universities: University College London and University of Helsinki, as well as the National Technical University of Ukraine «Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Igor Sikorsky».

*University College London* has been the undisputed leader of the QS World University Rankings by Subject (Education) for several years in a row.

The official website of the university contains the page «Student partnership», which declares: «We want to support students to collaborate with us as full partners in every aspect of their education. Facilitating a variety of opportunities for students to engage with will ensure that we are drawing on the creativity and talent of our student body to improve our university» (UCL. Student partnership). This activity meets the goal of developing student involvement and leadership, which is one of the strategic goals of the university, adopted by 2021. To achieve this goal, several practical steps have been developed and implemented:

- gathering feedback through surveys, focus groups or workshops to help us identify trends and establish priorities;
- student representation on committees, panels, steering groups and project teams;
- partnership with students, exchange of views and discussion of decisions with student representatives in the Staff-Student Consultative Committee, which works in each structural unit of the university;

- funding projects for UCL ChangeMakers faculties and departments to help take into account student feedback and ideas. Within these projects, students and academic staff work together in partnership to improve the quality of education;

- work on the Student Quality Reviewers project, in which two students work in pairs with a teacher to establish a constructive dialogue about student assessment and the teaching experience of students in the course.

It should be noted that the official website of the university provides quite complete information about the partnership with students: university strategic documents that ensure this process; «UCL Survey Policy Guide to running a student survey», «Guide to running a student survey»; «Student Questionnaire Template». Separate pages are devoted to the activities of the Staff-Student Consultative Committee; projects of faculties, institutes and departments of UCL ChangeMakers; Student Quality Reviewers project.

For example, within UCL ChangeMakers, the winning department's project receives 850 pounds to cover project costs and student participation. The authors were interested in the project Division of Surgery and Interventional Science (Faculty of Medical Sciences) «Sculpturing in Surgery: A Marriage between Art and Science».16 undergraduate students in surgery and bachelors in art were admitted to study (anatomy is an essential educational discipline for both specialities), and famous sculptors were invited. In addition to improving anatomical knowledge, putting it into practice and developing creativity, the project aimed to develop students' skills of observation, hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills and understanding of symmetry and proportions, which is essential for both majors (UCL. Sculpturing in Surgery: A Marriage between Art and Science).

In the context of our study, the most interesting is the page «Closing the loop: informing students about how their feedback has affected UCL», which demonstrates the improvement of university infrastructure and the educational process. The specific results of taking into account the student voice in various aspects of university life: from the equipment of university buildings to the academic support of young students – are presented on the page eloquently titled «Your feedback is shaping UCL». Here are some examples. In 2018, there were complaints from students that session exams had been held in the places that were not comfortable and unequipped. These reviews resulted in the exams for the summer session of 2018 to be held in the ExCel London conference centre in bright, quiet rooms with air conditioning, where there are places for food, rest and study, as well as a room for prayers and first aid. The site features a video of a virtual tour of a new exam venue, from a subway map explaining the journey to a classroom tour and practical advice for students, such as arriving half an hour before the exam (UCL. Watch

a new video about Excel London – the 2018 venue for UCL summer exams).

As for the example of improving academic support: students noted that the university does not pay enough attention to academic writing. As a result, during the first semester of the 2019–2020 academic year, the Academic Communication Center was opened – a new support service aimed at improving the writing and speaking skills of UCL students, which works closely with academic faculties and departments of the university to establish specialized seminars, academic disciplines and textbooks for language improvement. The website of the Center presents all faculties that offer various programs: credit modules, additional courses, seminars, online resources for the development of academic English (UCL Academic Communication Center).

*Helsingin yliopisto – University of Helsinki* offers several feedback channels for students. The university's website has a page with the eloquent title «How can I participate and make a difference?». Students are invited to participate in the work of decision-making bodies: The University Council and the University Board, councils of faculties and institutes, Education Programming Steering Committees, The Student Academic Appeals Committee, which protects the rights of students. An important channel for student influence is the Student Union of the University of Helsinki, which was founded in 1868. The website of the Student Union presents in details its activities to protect the interests of students at the university, city and society; committees, associations and organizations of the Student Union, in the work of which any student can participate. Also, there are presented the activities of student representatives at all levels of leadership – from temporary working groups to senior governing bodies of the university and Education Programming Steering Committee (Student Union of the University of Helsinki. Student Representatives).

As part of this study, the authors note an example of the impact of students on education at the University of Helsinki. Akseli Rouvari, a member of the Student Union Board responsible for education, communication, environment and climate policy, is the initiator of the training course on sustainable society and the student representative in the program group. So far, this is a pilot course, but in the future, it will be familiar to all students (University of Helsinki. Science helps us change the world).

Here is one example of student influence on Finnish public policy. In 2019, the representatives of the university together with the National Union of University Students of Finland and the Union of Students of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences presented proposals for the program of the new government of Finland. Student requirements focused on three topics: education, student social protection, and the global climate. The website describes in detail how

the new government program has taken these proposals into account: some have been taken into account in full, some – partly. For example, students' demand for free education was partly taken into account – tuition fees for students from outside the EU were not abolished. But the climate requirement for Finland to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 was accepted by the government; however, the term was postponed for five years – until 2035 (University of Helsinki. The government program through the eyes of a student).

Another way to make the university the best place to study and work is to take surveys and leave feedback on the site. The University of Helsinki presents several examples of surveys depending on the topic: university survey on the learning environment; nationwide surveys of Finnish bachelor's graduates; monitoring of graduates' careers; a survey of students from other countries doing international exchange courses. Besides, the university website provides an opportunity for everyone to send feedback through the service «Feedback» and in the same way get a response (University of Helsinki. Make a difference by providing feedback).

Unfortunately, Ukrainian higher education institutions do not show such openness and transparency. The authors failed in finding the proper units on the websites of Ukrainian universities with information on the impact of student voice on educational practice. Therefore, the authors assume that the reason for this is that the concept of cooperation with students as full partners in every aspect of their education has not yet found practical implementation in domestic universities.

Thus, on the website of the National Technical University of Ukraine «Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Igor Sikorsky» a survey of students on the assessment of teachers and their disciplines was announced. Teacher assessment is an official tool for assessing the quality of pedagogical work at the university. Due to this function, the management of the department can learn about the quality of teaching and take further actions. The results of the assessment will be available to the teacher and the head of the department only in the form of weighted average assessment results.

The teacher is assessed according to 5 criteria:

- insistence teacher;
- ability to deliver material to students;
- ability to establish a partnership with the student;
- general culture and tact concerning students;
- use of means of remote communication (KPI.

Survey of students through the EU Campus. 19/20 academic year, 2nd semester).

Information on responding to suggestions and feedback from students was found in the Report of the first vice-rector on work in 2019 (KPI. On the state and improvement of educational activities at the university. Materials of the report of the first vice-rector Y. I. Yakimenko). It is noted that in 2019, based on the results of consideration of student applications,



there were 30 teacher replacements, 21 disciplines were removed from the curriculum, 22 new disciplines were included in the curriculum; 55 changes were made to the content of academic disciplines, technical equipment of 44 classrooms was updated. In addition to registered applications, students' oral appeals were also taken into account, including the ones given during meetings with the administration, as well as information from social networks. Unfortunately, the vice-rector did not specify these changes.

One of the most exciting projects initiated by students and supported by university management is the construction of the art space «Vezha» («Tower»). An initiative group has carried out this project since 2013, headed by Dmytro Stolyarenko, a graduate student of the Department of Philosophy. The idea of the project is to turn the half-ruined left tower of the main building of the university into an art space. The project creators took part in the Nescafe Competition and won it, receiving funding for the reconstruction of the premises. Now the basement and the courtyard adjacent to the art space have been repaired in addition to the upper rooms in the tower. «Vezha» has become a place where creative university youth can present their achievements. It hosts literary evenings, concerts, exhibitions of paintings and photographs, lectures, festivals, film screenings and charity fairs. Furthermore, young researchers have found a place here for the implementation of their start-ups (for example, programmers) (In NTUU «KPI» opened a student art space «Vezha»).

**Conclusions.** The understanding of the role of students in the educational process is gradually changing in the public consciousness. From the subject-object paradigm in the relationship between the university and students, in which students were given the role of a passive object, there is a transition to subject-subject relations, where students are seen as full partners in education area. The initial conceptual idea for analyzing the problems associated with student participation

in university governance is the idea of partnership in the context of the university environment. Only when students are perceived as partners in the university community, and the students themselves feel this role, the authors can talk about the effectiveness of opportunities (policies, mechanisms, procedures, tools) for university participation and the personal motivation of students to join university governance.

At the same time, it is crucial to conceptually clarify the key concepts used by European researchers in studying the topic of student participation. One of the essential definitions in this context is student voice. Summarizing the different views and approaches, the authors propose to consider the student voice as a general idea that students have their unique view of education and should be able to make a real contribution to decision-making, influencing results, expressing their views, promoting their ideas and feeling the result of their influence.

An analysis of the official websites of domestic and foreign higher education institutions allowed the authors to conclude that the studied universities use different models of obtaining student votes. The University of Helsinki has an authoritative Student Union. In UCL, the authors can note regular cooperation of students with teachers within the various educational projects. In Ukrainian universities, the most common form of cooperation with students is the evaluation of teachers and their disciplines. However, the results of decision-making in these surveys and the impact of students' voices on the educational process are hardly presented on the official university websites. Other forms of student influence are more often related to socio-cultural and sports aspects, organization of leisure and entertainment.

Further research involves the study of specific policies, mechanisms, procedures, tools for student participation in university governance in European and domestic higher education institutions.

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## УЧАСТЬ СТУДЕНТІВ У ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННІ ЯКОСТІ ОСВІТИ В УНІВЕРСИТЕТІ

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У статті актуалізовано проблеми, пов'язані з концепцією залучення студентства до процесів формування, вироблення та реалізації життєво важливих рішень у сфері вищої освіти. Наголошено, що актуальність студентської участі полягає в тому, що студенти є не лише зацікавленою стороною, а й рівноправними партнерами як у процесах університетського врядування, так і в процесах забезпечення якості вищої освіти. У статті проаналізовано різні підходи до концепції «student voice» та запропоновано розглядати її як філософську і управлінську ідею про те, що студенти мають власний унікальний погляд на освіту і повинні мати можливість робити свій реальний внесок у процеси прийняття рішень у закладі вищої освіти, впливаючи на результати, висловлюючи свої погляди, просуваючи свої ідеї та відчуваючи результати свого впливу. Представлено різні моделі і механізми студентського голосу: представництво студентів в органах управління університету; діяльність студентів у керівних групах освітніх програм; опитування студентів, фокус-групи тощо; співпраця зі студентською організацією; регулярні неформальні дискусії між студентами і викладачами та керівництвом університету. У статті проаналізовано практичне втілення різних моделей та механізмів студентського голосу в європейських університетах: *University College London* та *University of Helsinki*, а також здійснено огляд впливу студентського голосу на освітню практику в українських закладах вищої освіти на прикладі Національного технічного університету України «Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського». Зроблено висновок, що в українських університетах порівняно з європейськими концепція співпраці зі студентами як з повноправними партнерами в кожному аспекті їх освіти ще не знайшла практичного втілення; форми впливу студентів частіше стосуються лише соціокультурних, спортивних аспектів, організації дозвілля і розваг.

**Ключові слова:** вища освіта; зворотний зв'язок; студенти; студентський голос; участь студентів в університетському врядуванні; якість вищої освіти.

## УЧАСТИЕ СТУДЕНТОВ В ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИИ КАЧЕСТВА ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

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*В статье актуализированы проблемы, связанные с концепцией привлечения студенчества к процессам формирования, выработки и реализации жизненно важных решений в сфере высшего образования. Отмечено, что актуальность студенческого участия заключается в том, что студенты являются не только заинтересованной стороной, но и равноправными партнерами как в процессах университетского управления, так и в процессах обеспечения качества высшего образования. В статье проанализированы различные подходы к концепции «student voice» и предложено рассматривать ее как философскую и управленческую идею о том, что студенты имеют собственный уникальный взгляд на образование и должны иметь возможность делать свой реальный вклад в процессы принятия решений в высшем учебном заведении, воздействуя на результаты, выражая свои взгляды, продвигая свои идеи и ощущая результаты своего влияния. В статье представлены различные модели и механизмы студенческого голоса. Проанализировано практическое воплощение различных моделей и механизмов студенческого голоса в европейских университетах: University College London и University of Helsinki, а также осуществлен обзор влияния студенческого голоса на образовательную практику в украинских университетах на примере Национального технического университета Украины «Киевский политехнический институт имени Игоря Сикорского». Сделан вывод, что в украинских высших учебных заведениях по сравнению с европейскими концепция сотрудничества со студентами как с полноправными партнерами в каждом аспекте их образования еще не нашла практического воплощения; формы воздействия студентов чаще касаются только социокультурных, спортивных аспектов, организации досуга и развлечений.*

**Ключевые слова:** высшее образование; обратная связь; студенты; студенческий голос; участие студентов в университетском управлении; качество высшего образования.

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