



Agency and co-agency in education: potential, risks and support strategies

*Valeriia Ilchenko,
Olena Karpenko,
Natalia Startseva*

In the modern educational landscape, there is an increasing focus on the student's personal qualities, especially their ability to make independent decisions, set goals, and reflect on their own experience. The concept of agency incorporates these abilities and enables a holistic approach to the student as an active subject of the learning process [1, p. 2]. On the other hand, influenced by modern realities, national educational systems in many countries are in a state of transformational changes, which requires an appropriate and coordinated response from all internal and external stakeholders of the educational process, namely students, teachers, parents and the wider community. Co-agency focuses on the social dimension of learning, where interaction and cooperation between participants in the educational process create added value for individual development [3, p. 135; 11, p. 428].

Recent research on student agency and co-agency is actively developing in the context of educational transformations caused by globalization, digitalization and the transition to a student-centered approach.

The concept of agency is addressed in the works of such scholars as J. Lantolf and A. Pavlenko, J. Flowerdew and L. Miller, A. Bandura, G. Biesta and M. Tedder, M. Emirbayer and A. Mische and others. In particular, A. Bandura defines agency as the ability of the individual to influence their own life path based on their own beliefs and goals [1, p. 6]. D. Little, Ph. Ben-

son, R. Ryan, and E. Deci define agency as a driving force that promotes learning autonomy and the formation of skills for independent planning, evaluation, and adjustment of the student's learning path [10, p. 15; 2, p. 1; 17, p. 233].

Apart from agency, modern science is increasingly paying attention to the concept of co-agency, i.e. the joint engagement of educational stakeholders in knowledge creation, decision-making and mutual support. The importance of social interaction is emphasized by L. Vygotsky, D. Palfreyman, S. Mercer and Z. Dörnyei, G. Biesta and M. Tedder, C. Damşa, and others. D. Palfreyman states that the learning process is directly related to the family, learning community or other social groups [15, p. 353]. L. Vygotsky and S. Mercer emphasize the importance of social interaction for the development of the student's cognitive activity [20, p. 25; 11, p. 430]. G. Biesta and M. Tedder highlight the interdependence of the student's personal resources and the educational environment [3, p. 137]. In the work of C. Damşa, co-agency is seen as a driver of collective responsibility, critical thinking and student independence [5, p. 35]. S. Mercer and Z. Dörnyei stress the important role of the teacher-facilitator in creating an emotionally safe learning environment as a prerequisite for the formation and development of student agency and co-agency [12, p. 52].

The risks that arise when implementing agentic and co-agentic approaches in

the educational process are addressed by D. Bueno, A. Davis, O. Holden et al., and other scholars. They argue that in the context of online education, one of the most serious challenges to agency and co-agency is the tendency to violate the principles of academic integrity [4, p. 456; 6, p. 4; 8, p. 1]. The issue of digital inequality as a significant barrier to the implementation of the agentic approach is highlighted by H. Mukhlis et al., J. Van Dijk, W. Holmes and K. Porayska-Pomsta, R. Eynon та A. Geniets, L. Robinson at al., and other scholars. R. Eynon and A. Geniets emphasize that limited access to digital resources reduces the level of student engagement and autonomy [7, p. 464], increases inequality in access to learning resources and academic opportunities [13, p. 811], affects the student's academic progress and undermines their ability to control their own education [16, p. 571].

Despite considerable attention to the theoretical understanding of the concepts of agency and co-agency, certain aspects of their interaction in the educational context remain insufficiently studied. In particular, the potential risks that arise in the process of developing student agency and co-agency, as well as pedagogical approaches aimed at mitigating them, require further research.

The purpose of the article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomena of agency and co-agency in the learning context. The research objectives aim to establish the relationship between agency and co-agency, analyze the main risks associated with their development, and strategies to support agency and co-agency.

The methodological framework is based on content analysis of scientific sources to systematize theoretical approaches; comparative method to relate the concepts of agency and co-agency; descriptive and analytical approach to interpret modern educational practices.

Agency is defined as the ability of an individual to act autonomously in accordance

with personal beliefs, goals, and the context of a social environment [1, p. 10]. It is based on the mechanisms of self-reflection, self-regulation, and anticipation of the results of an individual's actions. In education, this is manifested through individualized approaches to learning, the formation of the student's goals and learning strategies, initiative in choosing materials and learning methods, and regular self-assessment of their progress [10, p. 19].

Unlike agency which is individually oriented, co-agency emphasizes the joint engagement of students in the learning process. It is manifested through active participation in group assignments and projects that involve the assignment of roles, collective problem solving, mutual support in achieving goals, shared responsibility for the final result, and reflection on learning achievements [3, p. 147]. Involvement in a co-agentic environment helps to develop communication and teamwork skills, responsibility, and mutual respect.

Many scholars emphasize the social nature of learning, highlighting the close relationship between agency and co-agency since the student's self-fulfillment is possible only in the interaction with other participants of the educational process. According to the ecological model of agency, student agency is formed as a result of the dynamic interaction of the student's personal assets (experience, motivation and beliefs), learning environment, as well as internal and external stakeholders of the educational process [3, p. 137]. L. Vygotsky focused on the social nature of learning, emphasizing that meaningful results are possible only in a collaborative environment [20, p. 30]. The idea of the social nature of learning is further developed by S. Mercer, who describes co-agency as a process of construction of shared knowledge through dialogue in which participants (agents) share responsibility, support each other, and achieve their goals together [11, p. 435]. An example of a learning situation that promotes the simultaneous development

of agency and co-agency is participation in pair work and group projects, as these forms of learning process organization allow students to take initiative and responsibility for the result, while engaging them in cooperation, joint decision-making, exchange of ideas, and mutual support. In group interaction, each participant not only realizes their own potential but also contributes to the achievement of a collective goal, which forms the ability to act autonomously but in collaboration with others. Thus, learning activities acquire a social dimension.

Despite the potential benefits, the implementation of agentic and co-agentic approaches poses a number of risks that can negatively affect the quality of the educational process.

Teachers note that not all students are ready for a high level of autonomy. Some learners may demonstrate uncertainty facing a free choice of assignments or topics, avoid making independent decisions, which leads to a decrease in motivation and the need for the teacher's support [2, p. 10; 3, p. 147; 10, p. 22;]. An uneven assignment of responsibilities in group work is another problem. Some students take on leadership roles, while others avoid participation, thus reducing the effectiveness of co-agentic interaction [11, p. 430]. Conflicts may also arise due to differences in training, motivation, and learning styles [12, p. 28].

The digital divide is a particular threat to agency. Not all students have equal access to online resources, which impairs autonomous learning. In addition, insufficient digital literacy hinders the effective organization of independent or group distance learning [18].

Academic integrity also requires particular attention. Under the increased student autonomy, the risk of fraudulent practices, such as academic plagiarism, unauthorized use of reference materials, or collective student interaction during the distance learning process is growing [6, p. 5; 8, p. 3]. Such practices indicate a lack of ethical beliefs

and require educational efforts and the development of assignments that enables mechanical copying of information.

Risks identified by students include academic overload due to excessive study planning without teacher support; competition and tension in group interaction if the student's emotional intelligence is underdeveloped; misunderstanding or rejection of autonomous practices by students with traditional educational values [6, p. 12].

Among the risks faced by teachers when implementing agentic and co-agentic approaches is the need to reconsider their role, master facilitation techniques, and adjust the program to the individual needs of students. This is coupled with organizational problems, such as lack of time, high workload, limited resources, and lack of administrative support. Educational institutions often do not have clear mechanisms for promoting agency and co-agency in the educational process, which makes it difficult to implement them as sustainable practices [3, p.147].

Successful implementation of the agentic and co-agentic approaches requires a holistic pedagogical strategy to support students and teachers. It should include the step-by-step formation of autonomy, the development of communication skills, and organizational support from teachers as well as educational institutions.

This step-by-step implementation of autonomy allows students to adapt to the increased responsibility, avoid the stress associated with such transition, and at the same time gradually develop self-organization and reflection skills. For example, initially, the teacher offers a limited choice of assignments or topics, then allows students to choose their own work formats and research topics.

The development of co-agency requires specially organized interaction. It is advisable to use facilitated discussions with the assignment of roles (moderator, speaker), to conduct trainings on active listening, communication, and conflict resolution techniques. Reflective sessions after completing

group assignments are also important, as students analyze the process of cooperation, identify difficulties, and suggest ways to improve interaction.

The effective development of student agency and co-agency requires a change in the teacher's role. Instead of an authoritarian figure, the teacher should become a facilitator and mentor who guides students in the learning process, fosters their motivation, and promotes initiative and autonomy. This approach implies a partnership between the teacher and the student.

It is equally important to take into account institutional factors that influence the development of agency and co-agency, namely support from the administration [17, p. 232]. At the institutional level, ensuring the flexibility of curricula and the ability to adjust course content to the interests and needs of students is essential. Of special importance is the creation of an environment conducive to transparent communication between teachers and students with the administration providing support for educational innovations. Recognition of students as equal and active participants in the educational process should be reflected in the institution's mission, internal regulations and educational policies.

To enable teachers to perform these functions effectively, educational institutions need to provide conditions for their professional development: organize educational courses, workshops, and stimulate the exchange of experience in professional pedagogical communities.

In general, effective support for agency and co-agency is possible only if all stakeholders of the educational process act in a coordinated manner.

In the learning process, student agency plays an important role in shaping the student's autonomy, motivation, and responsibility for their learning outcomes and forms the basis of personal and academic growth. At the same time, co-agency enhances agency, as it is based on teamwork and mutual support. Collaboration in the

learning environment contributes to more effective knowledge acquisition and the development of communication skills.

However, the introduction of agentic and co-agentic approaches to learning is associated with certain risks. The main ones are academic overload of both students and teachers, difficulties in organizing teamwork, conflicts due to uneven involvement of participants, and resistance to change on the part of teachers and students used to traditional learning models.

The effective addressing of the challenges associated with the implementation of agentic and co-agentic practices in the educational process requires a comprehensive system of pedagogical support for students and teachers at the personal and institutional levels.

Prospects for further research are related to the study of the influence of cultural, gender, age, and institutional factors on the dynamics of the above processes, as well as the development of tools for assessing the level of student agency and co-agency.

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Відомості про авторів:

Ільченко Валерія Віталіївна — старший викладач кафедри ділової іноземної мови та перекладу; Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна; Харків, Україна; e-mail: valeriia.ilchenko@karazin.ua; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6757-1882>

Карпенко Олена Валентинівна — старший викладач кафедри ділової іноземної мови та перекладу; Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна; Харків, Україна; e-mail: yelena.karpenko@karazin.ua; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6795-2487>

Старцева Наталія Миколаївна — кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри ділової іноземної мови та перекладу; Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна; Харків, Україна; e-mail: nstartseva@karazin.ua; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0264-913X>