The authority in upbringing and education of contemporary youth

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Abstract. The study refers to the views of philosophers and educators on authority in upbringing and education. An attempt was made to answer the question of whether authorities are needed in the upbringing of modern youth – what role they played in the past and in modern times. The purpose of the theoretical considerations was to determine the role of authorities in the development of youth, to show the changes in the formation of authorities over the years and the factors affecting the crisis of authorities in the modern world. The problem of the teacher's authority was also addressed by citing the results of surveys conducted among students.

Autorytet w wychowaniu i edukacji współczesnej młodzieży

Słowa kluczowe: autorytet, wychowanie, edukacja, nauczyciel, wartości, młodzież

Streszczenie. W opracowaniu odniesiono się do poglądów filozofów i pedagogów, dotyczących autorytetu w wychowaniu i edukacji. Próbowano odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy w wychowaniu współczesnej młodzieży potrzebne są autorytety – jaką rolę spełniały w przeszłości oraz w czasach współczesnych. Celem teoretycznych rozważań było ustalenie roli autorytetów w rozwoju młodzieży, ukazanie zmian w kształtowaniu się autorytetów na przestrzeni lat oraz czynników mających wpływ na kryzys autorytetów we współczesnym świecie. Poruszono również problem autorytetu nauczyciela przytaczając wyniki sondaży przeprowadzonych wśród uczniów.

Introduction

The phenomenon of authority, known since ancient times, continues to be a subject of contemplation among contemporary scholars as an integral element of social life and educational influences. For hundreds of years, education has drawn upon authorities who held a crucial position in social life as conveyors of knowledge and values, contributing to the intellectual and spiritual development of individuals. However, in the 21st century, we observe a reluctance towards authorities, a crisis in their role in education and social life, and a questioning of their significance.

On one hand, the importance and necessity of authority are emphasized, while on the other hand, it is rejected, arguing that it contradicts human freedom and serves as a tool of coercion. In today's world, young people are becoming ideologically independent and rebellious against the imposition of norms and values. However, living in a pluralistic and complex socio-cultural reality, they still require support from adults that would provide them with a sense of security and life stability.

Authority (from Latin *auctoritas* – power, recognition, significance) is a psychosocial phenomenon of influence exerted by individuals or institutions on intellectual development or interpersonal relationships. It entails respect and recognition for someone or something arising from their superiority or competence (Szlachta, 2004, p. 27). It is a distinct attribute inherent in a person or institution, by virtue of which others submit to their will. It is a relationship between two individuals in which one recognizes and complies with the will of the other (Jasiński, 2012, pp. 7–10).

Western European civilization, built on the foundations of ancient Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Judeo-Christian culture, has developed a value system based on authorities. Three sources have contributed to the creation of durable forms of communal life over the centuries: the family, the nation, and the state, with the process of their construction largely relying on the realization of the idea of authority. The concept of authority originated in ancient Rome and referred to the council of experienced men. It represented a form of intermediary power aimed at reinforcing decisions made by the Roman Senate, thereby increasing the citizens' trust in authority. In Roman society, authorities included lawyers and rhetoricians who explained existing norms, individuals with special competence to assess the truthfulness of certain claims or norms. This did not pertain

to decision-making but rather to the power of persuasion and the legalization of authority (epistemic authority)[1]. Authority was also conferred upon individuals with power who imposed their will and demanded obedience due to their position of strength (deontic authority, *de iure*)[2]. The Roman Emperor became the subject of authority as a person whose will was recognized as the sole source of norms in the social and religious spheres.

Since ancient times, authority has become an instrument of influence, aimed at changing the perception of the world and its order. It has become one of the forms of wielding power that unconditionally subjugates individuals, disregarding their needs and aspirations, limiting individual and group freedom (Tchorzewski, 2017, p. 192).

In ancient times, reference was also made to personal authorities, where the ideal and educational authority was a strong, athletic, educated individual capable of logical and rational thinking, possessing a ‚beautiful body and soul’, and being honest and noble. The ideals and models present in ancient culture have not lost their value and are still relevant in contemporary times.

During the Middle Ages (5th to 15th century), three personal models existed: the ascetic, the knight, and the wise and powerful ruler. The ascetic embodied the authority, being devoted to God, prayerful, and preparing for eternal life, renouncing worldly pleasures. Reference was also made to the authority of the knight, a strong, courageous, and valiant individual who loved God and their lord. The authority figures also included rulers and kings who were renowned, wealthy, and defended their territory, achieving success on the battlefield.

In the Renaissance period (15th-16th century), reference was made to the authority of the humanist, a person who was extensively educated, knowledgeable in foreign languages (Greek and Latin), history, literature, grammar, poetics, bold in expressing their own views, and engaged in social affairs. Examples of Renaissance individuals were Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536).

During the Baroque era (16th-18th century), individuals began to discuss their physicality and bodily needs, while still considering God and the sins committed. They grappled with various moral and religious contradictions. Opulence and wealth were highly valued, and the selfishness of the nobility led

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[1] Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that deals with the relationships between cognition and reality, the nature of knowledge, and the ability to understand.

[2] Deontology – the science of duties and obligations.

to numerous conflicts and wars, which contributed to the downfall of the Commonwealth. During this time, it is difficult to find esteemed authorities worthy of emulation, apart from leading philosophers of the era. René Descartes argued that the essence of humanity lies in the ability to reason, as expressed in the famous saying *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) – thinking leads to the pursuit of truth.

In the Enlightenment period (late 17th-mid 18th century), there was no single human model typical of that era. Writers and philosophers emphasized that rational, educated, worldly, erudite, reform-minded, patriotic, and humanistic individuals were worthy of emulation. Great Enlightenment thinkers in Poland, such as Ignacy Krasicki, Adam Naruszewicz, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Jan Potocki, and Stanisław August Poniatowski, were regarded as authorities in many circles at that time.

In the Romantic era, the romantic hero emerged—a remarkable individual with a rich psyche, experiencing dilemmas and intense emotions, a rebellious individualist, mysterious and misunderstood by people, undergoing unhappy love, fighting alone for the freedom of the homeland. They desired to change the world, defend their own and others' freedom, dedicate themselves unconditionally to some idea, and transform themselves to atone for their sins, for example, Jacek Soplica (Cogito, 2023).

During positivism (from the fall of the January Uprising in 1863–1864 to the last decade of the 19th century), educational ideals were based on the authorities of hardworking and socially engaged individuals. The slogans of "grassroots work", "emancipation and equal rights" were meant to promote education and provide assistance to lower social classes, teaching them how to work for their own benefit. The philosophical currents of this period included scientism (trust in science, observation, and experience), utilitarianism (the belief that everything a person does should be socially useful), and evolutionism (the transformation of all forms of life into higher and more perfect ones).

Among all the slogans of the positivist worldview, the greatest role was attributed to education. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903, English philosopher) argued that the only educational value is knowledge, especially in the field of exact and natural sciences (Fita, 2020). Positivist educators identified five aspects of human existence: physical, vocational, familial, civic, and aesthetic, which together can create conditions for the successful development of individuals. Polish writers and publicists of this period (Bolesław Prus, Stefan Żeromski, Eliza Orzeszkowa) embraced this idea and portrayed positivist heroes in their works, who became

authorities to whom we still refer in the process of education and upbringing, even today (Mucha, 2012, pp. 30-47).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, two types of education dominated: national education and independence education, based on the authority of Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935). Despite the passage of time, these types of education have not lost their relevance (Koprowski, 2017).

Each historical era has developed a specific image of humanity, an ideal of education largely based on authorities representing specific values. Values were linked to moral norms, applicable to all and necessary for the proper functioning of individuals and society. The values in each historical era were adapted to political, socioeconomic, philosophical, and cultural conditions. Often, their content was influenced by the expectations of political elites, philosophers, and social systems. Literary works were a source of authorities and specific values, depicting people worthy of emulation, offices, or institutions whose activities were based on transcendental and timeless values, regardless of political ideologies, such as patriotism, freedom, respect for heroes, and care for the weak and oppressed.

For centuries, the concept of authority has been associated with power: law, senate, popes, church, monarchs, and other forms of secular and official power.

Authorities in the lives of contemporary youth

Currently, during a crisis of authority, the question arises about the need for authority in education. Is it a natural and unconditional phenomenon, or does referring to examples require intentional actions from teachers and educators? At the beginning of life, children acquire patterns of behaviour, norms, and values from their parents or grandparents. Later on, significant individuals become idols or media authorities—popular figures who generate interest in their surroundings, such as TV celebrities, athletes, artists, film characters—less frequently teachers and prominent public figures. In adult life, people also seek authorities and often rely on social authorities, which is inseparably linked to the social opinion regarding a person's reputation (Olubiński, 2012, pp. 7–20). Behaviour, lifestyle, and cherished values form the basis of morality, which is an important criterion for considering someone as a worthy role model. An authoritative person must have the ability to influence minds and consciences, which consequently leads to fascination and a desire to identify with their values. Authority, in a subjective understanding, can be a specific idea, moral principle, or human reason; it can exist only when we give it our acceptance (Skarga, 2007, p. 98).

It is a relativized and interdisciplinary phenomenon, characterized as a trait, property, set of values, relationship, mode of influence, or impact (Jarmuszko, 2013, pp. 22–25).

Authority is embodied by a specific individual to whom it is attributed as a distinctive attribute. Through a combination of qualities and competencies, and through their words and actions, this person influences the formation of judgments and attitudes in others who perceive this influence as valuable. The authority of a significant person arises from their social position and personal values. It is a system of mutual interactions in which they have the ability to effectively and naturally influence others, and those others hold them in respect and trust, drawing inspiration for their own behaviour. Authority implies superiority and subordination, axiological identification—it is an act of will and intellect (Jarmuszko, 2013, p. 31).

In the literature on the subject, we can encounter various classifications of authorities:

- Meritorious authority (individuals possessing exceptional talents, skills, or particular competencies).
- Moral authority (when a person gains respect due to their behaviour in line with commonly accepted values and ethical norms).
- Formal authority (a person fulfilling important social functions and roles) (Chałas, Maj, 2016, p. 132).

We can distinguish individual (subjective-personal) authority and subjective-institutional authority, as well as internal authority, which results from voluntary submission and willingness to conform, and external authority, which is exerted through pressure to gain submission – stemming from a desire for power and excessive ambition. Another division includes:

– Epistemic (intellectual) authority, carried by individuals with extensive knowledge in the fields of science, art, religion, or philosophy – experts and specialists in a particular domain.

– Deontic authority (superiors), individuals holding managerial or official positions (Piórkowski, 2016, p. 16).

Another division of authority includes:
– True and timeless authority.
– Integral and partial authority.
– Individual and group authority.
– Real and fictional authority.
– Intellectual and moral authority (Łobocki, 2002, p. 105).

Personal authorities fulfil roles as life guides, advisors, mentors, helpers, or interpreters. Typically, these individuals are experts in their field, possess good character, and have the skills for harmonious social interactions and doing good. They are people with rich and extraordinary personalities, equipped with competence, morality, and charisma. They are characterized by righteousness, excellence in thinking and actions, both in logical-pragmatic and ethical senses (Żywczok, 2006, p. 32).

In summary, the characteristics of a subject endowed with social authority include:

– Above-average formal or social status.
– Sound general knowledge and deep, extensive expertise in their field of activity.
– Rich life and professional experience.
– Diligent performance of work and duties, innovative actions.
– Effectiveness in their activities, achieving above-average results in their specialty.
– Prosocial attitude, willingness and ability to help.
– Valued personal qualities.
– Intellectual qualities.
– Socially accepted moral character.
– Physical attractiveness (Jarmuszko, 2013, p. 26).

Authorities influence people's emotions, thinking, and decision-making; they help in rational action and serve as sources of knowledge, skills, and conditions for action.

Axiological authorities, such as role models and sources of knowledge about values, fascinate people, provoking imitation and providing guidance on how to act – they fulfil an educational function.

Axiological authorities also include objective norms of conduct, conscience, the concept of good, and the law.

Cognitive authorities are accepted to acquire knowledge that we cannot directly delve into ourselves using our senses and reason. In such cases, we rely on indirect sources of knowledge, namely external authorities, information carriers, such as books, newspapers, media, and above all, experts.

Practical authorities, such as trainers, instructors, or vocational subject teachers, teach skills. Organizational authorities include experts, specialists, superiors, who assist in group and professional activities. They can be formal authorities, as their power is described in the rules of the institution, or informal authorities

(Jacko, 2007, pp. 19–30). In literature, there are various positions regarding the need and role of authority in education, but two predominant views can be identified: traditional and alternative.

The traditional view emphasizes the role of authorities in transmitting knowledge and values. They serve as reference points for students who trust them and aspire to emulate them (Łażewska, 2013, p. 58). The alternative view argues that authorities do not transmit knowledge but rather reveal the ambiguity of truth, challenging the established certainties. In postmodern times, the role of the authority is to present the pluralistic world of differences rather than impart knowledge, values, or norms of behaviour. An alternative authority does not provide answers but offers suggestions, encourages creative exploration, and provokes thought (Witkowski, 2009, p. 303).

During the years 2009–2012, Pope John Paul II was considered the greatest authority for 94% of Poles (CBOS, 2009). 86% of young people admitted that they feel the need for authorities and role models in today's times, which they strive to emulate in their lives. Only 5% acknowledged that they do not require authorities, while 9% had no opinion on the matter (Wasylewicz, 2006). More than half (53%) of the surveyed youth declared that they have someone worthy of emulation in their lives, while 35% stated otherwise.

Among the youth, 53% find their role models within their families, 47% consider the Pope as an authority figure, 41% look up to media figures (actors – 19%, singers – 10%, athletes – 8%, TV show hosts – 3%), 9% mentioned the Church, and 8% named Jerzy Owsiak. Furthermore, 4% mentioned teachers and an equal percentage named Kuba Wojewódzki, while 3% named Lech Wałęsa as their role models (CBOS, 2009).

Other studies conducted among junior high school students indicate that 79% consider having a role model important, while 16% claim not to need one. Among the students, 58.3% admitted to having a role model, most frequently citing well-known and popular individuals (68%), with only one in four students acknowledging their parents as role models, and 6.2% mentioning teachers. When asked about the determining qualities of a role model, the youth mentioned experience (79%), knowledge (70%), education (45%), position (20%), and popularity (16%) (Barabas, 2019, pp. 15–20).

Contemporary times witness the emergence of axiological chaos and moral relativism, alongside an existential nihilism, all of which contribute to a crisis of authorities. Profound values, traditionally transmitted by parents, grandparents, the Church, and various social and educational organizations, begin to lose

their fundamental significance (Tchorzewski, 2017, p. 187). In their stead, experts, idols, celebrities, and public figures assume positions of influence, while the Catholic Church and ecclesiastical hierarchs gradually diminish in relevance.

The authority of teachers

In the professional work of a teacher, the issue of authority is particularly significant as it constitutes the foundation for collaboration with students and parents. Undoubtedly, the basis for building a teacher's authority lies in their pedagogical knowledge and skills, as well as their credibility and respect towards students. In contemporary pedagogy, this concept is understood as respect, trust, and esteem for the teacher as a scientific expert, advisor, and guide in difficulties. The concept is also defined as a combination of diverse qualities that make the teacher valued and respected by students who aspire to emulate them (Różycka, 2004, p. 254). Authority is comprised of moral integrity, high personal culture, intellectual capital, trust from others, expertise, civil courage, and a way of acting and behaving in accordance with values such as justice, honesty, truthfulness, and respect for human beings (Paszkiewicz, 2014, p. 112).

In pedagogical literature, various aspects of a teacher's authority are distinguished:

1. Environmental authority signifies that the teacher becomes an authority for parents, the local community, and stakeholders in the educational process within the environment.
2. School authority refers to the teacher being an authority for their students.
3. Scientific (intellectual) authority pertains to knowledge and professional qualifications, substantive and pedagogical competencies, trust in the truthfulness of statements, justifications, and assertions.
4. Moral authority concerns the teacher's disposition and principles of conduct towards students and other individuals, as well as adherence to the teacher's code of ethics.
5. External authority arises from power and the desire to subjugate students through the use of force, prohibitions, and orders. This authority stems from personal preferences or character traits and is employed in authoritarian education.
6. Internal authority can be attained by a teacher who constructively influences students, mobilizes them to think and act independently, and voluntarily gains their obedience (Szempruch, 2013).

7. 7. Subjugating authority is based on the absolute submission of students, suppressing their independence and initiative by imposing predetermined patterns, judgments, and attitudes.

8. Liberating authority involves stimulating students' initiative, autonomy, and exploratory attitude (Korodziński, 2020, p. 37).

In practice, teachers build authority based on their knowledge, experience, methodological, psychological, pedagogical, and social competencies. The authority of a teacher can be reinforced through informal agreements (contracts) that allow both parties to effectively achieve their goals (Korodziński, 2020, p. 42).

Pedagogues argue that the foundation for building authentic teacher authority lies in the ability to establish a connection with students, actively listening to them, and conveying clear messages. Additionally, it involves respecting dignity and feelings, avoiding suspicion, granting students trust and balanced tolerance, as well as fairness towards all students, and fulfilling promises while aligning words with actions (Korbelak, Burkot, 2016, p. 7).

Speaking about the professional competencies that contribute to the authority of a modern teacher, the authors point out the following:

– Content-related competencies, which consist of a high level of specialized knowledge in the respective subject area, self-education aimed at deepening and updating acquired knowledge.
– Didactic and methodological competencies, involving knowledge of principles, methods, and forms of educating young people, taking into account modern means of communication.
– Educational competencies based on psychological knowledge regarding the developmental regularities of students and an individual approach to each student.
– Diagnostic and preventive competencies, which entail the ability to recognize learning difficulties and behavioural disorders and to respond to them promptly.
– Communication, planning, and project competencies, as well as media literacy (proficiency in using modern means of communication) (Strykowski, 2002; 2005, pp. 5-13).

According to students' opinions, the most important characteristics of a teacher who possesses authority are as follows:

– They are a teacher by vocation (46%).
– They treat students as partners (44%).

- They demonstrate a high level of personal culture (41%).
- They have extensive knowledge (41%).
- They can be self-critical (34%).
- They are involved in social, political, and religious activities (30%).
- They enhance their qualifications (27%).
- They exhibit impeccable ethical conduct (22%).
- They maintain a certain level of distance in their relationships with students (22%) (Korbelak, Burkot, 2016, p. 16).

Increasingly, we hear about the decline or complete lack of authority of teachers. The most common reasons for this phenomenon include:

1) Changes in social mores favouring student individualism, moral relativism, the right to independence, and self-expression of autonomy.
2) Societal criticism of schools, which fail to keep up with scientific and technological progress and civilizational changes, and do not fulfil their educational and preventive functions, as well as material deficiencies in schools.
3) Parental attitudes towards schools and teachers; lack of support from parents affects the teacher's image in the eyes of students.
4) Lack of appropriate role models to emulate and admire; the teaching profession often attracts individuals who are not suited for the job, who do not enjoy their work.
5) Low material status of the entire professional group and declining social prestige (Kuzin, Walat, 2019).
6) Remote learning leading to limited contact with teachers, weak influence of teachers on students, and a lack of opportunities to build authority.
7) Conflict situations in schools, lack of unity among teachers and school management, lack of consistent attitudes towards students, and diverse expectations.

Undoubtedly, authority plays a significant role in the educational process of students. It is a means to achieve educational and preventive goals. It can stimulate curiosity, develop interests, initiative, foster independence, encourage activity, and self-education. The authority of a teacher as an educator reflects socially esteemed values, norms, and principles.

Conclusions

Authority remains a subject of social and pedagogical discussions, eliciting various reflections and controversies. It is a phenomenon that is both relativized and interdisciplinary. Authority is embodied by a specific individual, object, idea, institution, and above all, a person.

An authority figure is someone who possesses a set of qualities and competencies, and through their words and actions, influences the formation of judgments and attitudes in others. They must have the ability to convey their views or judgments to people who willingly succumb to their suggestions. In today's era of dynamic social and cultural changes, lifestyle shifts, and value systems, we witness a crisis and decline of certain authorities. Most educators argue that authority plays a fundamental role in the process of education, influencing the attitudes and behaviours of the students. The essence of moral education lies in imparting theoretical axiological knowledge and providing worthy role models for emulation. The crisis of authority entails a breakdown of previously established equilibrium and a rejection of traditions, which can lead to the loss of cultural identity and significant limitations in the ability to navigate crisis situations. This may result in thoughtless actions that deviate from societal norms.

The teacher's authority plays an important role in the process of education and upbringing. The teacher should become a kind of partner, tutor, coach, actively accompanying students in their educational endeavours and team building. This is achieved through dialogue, discussions, and, above all, through setting a personal example, which contributes to the development of positive character traits and study habits.

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