
THE PHILOSOPHICAL PEDAGOGY OF HRYHORII SKOVORODA: SPIRITUAL EDUCATION AND THE PURSUIT OF INNER FREEDOM

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Abstract

This article examines the influence of Hryhorii Skovoroda's philosophy on his pedagogical views. Drawing from Skovoroda's literary heritage and previously published historical, philosophical, and pedagogical works, the study analyzes the key elements of his philosophical pedagogy. The article provides a detailed overview of Skovoroda's philosophical teachings and their application to educational practices. The analysis highlights the centrality of dialogical methods and moral and ethical education in Skovoroda's pedagogical philosophy. The authors conclude that Skovoroda's philosophical pedagogy, along with his broader practical philosophy, reflects a modern culture of freedom, making his ideas highly relevant for contemporary educational discourse.

Keywords: philosophical pedagogy, educational philosophy, dialogicity, moral education, modern culture of freedom

1. Introduction

Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda's philosophical teachings and pedagogical practices are often examined independently. As a result, his reflection on these practices and the influence of his philosophy on his pedagogical views are often overlooked. However, analyzing this influence and reconstructing Skovoroda's philosophical pedagogy can deepen our understanding of the context in which his pedagogical practices, relationships, and communication evolved.

In his works, Skovoroda emerges both as a critic of the educational, cultural, and social realities of his time and as an innovator in the field of pedagogy. This multifaceted approach allowed him to create a unique philosophy

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of teaching and education, rooted in his own pedagogical and philosophical autobiography. For researchers of educational philosophy, Skovoroda's legacy remains a largely untapped resource for the development of modern educational strategies. Today, more than ever, his philosophical and educational contributions warrant deeper study.

The figure of Skovoroda and his intellectual heritage have drawn attention from both scholars and admirers. Scholars have linked his ideological and theoretical contributions to various philosophical traditions. However, Skovoroda's philosophy primarily focuses on humanistic and ethical issues, elevating the spiritual and truly human aspects of existence [1]. Furthermore, some researchers, such as Chizhevsky, have identified his pedagogical views as a distinct element of his multifaceted intellectual legacy [2].

It is important to note that Skovoroda's educational and pedagogical activities largely occurred within informal educational settings. Even during his brief official employment as a teacher at the Pereyaslav Collegium during the 1768/69 academic year—when he taught a course on Christian morality—Skovoroda consistently sought to engage young people in philosophical discussions. He famously wrote:

"There is no hour unsuitable for studying useful sciences, and for those who moderately but constantly study subjects that are useful both in this life and the next, learning is not work but consolation. He who thinks about science loves it, and he who loves it never stops learning, even if he seems inactive from the outside" [3, c. 162].

Skovoroda's focus was not solely on the transmission of knowledge, but rather on developing ways of thinking. He understood that philosophical knowledge was one of the "useful" sciences that required alternative methods of teaching and assimilation. He sought to convey to young people a philosophy of life that could not be distilled into ready-made concepts, categories, or terminologies, nor could it be reduced to a predetermined worldview. Instead, it was a personal search for truth, a journey only undertaken by those who master the art of thinking [4].

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of Skovoroda's philosophy on his pedagogical views.

2. Materials and Methods

The chronological boundaries of the study encompass the second half of the 19th century, marking the period of scientific and educational activity of the scholar, teacher, and original philosopher Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda.

This article presents a qualitative study of the philosophical and pedagogical views expressed in the creative works of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda, utilizing the following research methods: analysis of scientific literature and an expert survey to evaluate the reliability of the selected sources.

The method of analyzing scientific literature allows for the collection of diverse information within the context of various assessments and opinions. Given

the limitations associated with the analysis of scientific literature—such as the quality, completeness, and subjective nature of the selected sources—an expert survey was conducted to verify the reliability of the selected materials.

In the first stage of the study, sources relevant to the research objectives were selected:

- **Primary sources:** The literary heritage of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda;
- **Secondary sources:** Articles and monographs dedicated to the philosophical and pedagogical legacy of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda.

In the second stage, an expert survey was conducted to assess the reliability of the secondary sources. A total of 14 experts participated in the survey. The criteria for expert selection included the publication of at least three articles on the philosophy or history of pedagogy in journals indexed in citation databases such as the Russian Science Citation Index, Scopus, or Web of Science. Experts were contacted via email and asked to evaluate the reliability of the selected materials for this study. On average, the experts rated the selected documents at a high level of reliability.

In the third stage, based on the literary heritage of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda and the selected scientific literature, a systematic analysis was conducted to explore the influence of Skovoroda's philosophy on his pedagogical views.

3. Results and Discussion

When examining the influence of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda's philosophy on his pedagogical views, it is useful to first analyze the European philosophical tradition, within which Skovoroda's worldview and pedagogical ideas were shaped. Wittgenstein aptly refers to the semantic intentionality of this tradition, particularly in relation to philosophical pedagogy, as "the invention of freedom" [5]. This highlights the idea that one of the key factors in the development of modern societies is education and upbringing.

In analyzing Skovoroda's philosophical pedagogy, it is essential to consider the ontological framework he establishes for both imagined and real educational practices. This framework not only responds to the challenges of his contemporary society but also extends its relevance to the broader geopolitical context of the time. Among the key challenges of the period is the growing societal need to broaden the educated stratum, to recognize the practical, not just theoretical, importance of science, and ultimately to articulate the need for a new kind of individual—one capable of productively utilizing the opportunities that modernity provides for the development of both the individual and society.

Such a formal articulation of the need for renewal is a recurring theme in the civilizational process. The issue of spiritual renewal and the formation of a new person consistently resurfaces during pivotal historical moments—times of radical cultural shifts and accelerated social changes. Teaching people to live and act in new ways, as history has shown, is a lengthy process, often accompanied by complex and unpredictable problems. Understanding new educational tasks

requires going beyond established forms of life, which, in turn, demands philosophical reflection on pedagogical practices. This is why philosophical pedagogy is essential in such analysis. During challenging times in each era, individuals who promote alternative lifestyles and educational approaches emerge, bringing new ideals and guidelines for human development.

Thus, the recurring constructs of European pedagogy can be attributed to educators driven by the idea of shaping a new person. The pedagogical experience encapsulated in the reflections and teachings of ancient philosophers serves as a source of inspiration for Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda, particularly in his effort to cleanse human consciousness of false ideals and values. This struggle is a recurring theme in Skovoroda's philosophical pedagogy [6]. Simultaneously, Skovoroda's modern criterion of usefulness is rooted in an anthropological interpretation of the "useful" and is framed by the oppositions of possible/impossible and difficult/easy [7]. However, Skovoroda steers clear of the radical utilitarianism characteristic of the Enlightenment imperatives of the 18th century, which, in the Western European tradition, is seen as a defining feature of pedagogical thought during that time [8].

Despite the socio-cultural differences between the Prussian and southern Russian contexts during the early and classical modern periods, there are notable similarities between the educational positions of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda—both reformers and advocates of formal education, despite their divergent life experiences and career ambitions. These similarities reflect a long-term repetition and consolidation of critical structural elements of modern spiritual culture, particularly in philosophical pedagogy. This reflects the ongoing philosophical reflection and its role in shaping educational spaces across historical periods.

Undoubtedly, the Western European culture of the 17th-18th centuries and the first half of the 19th century are closely interconnected. This connection reflects the need to consolidate cultural and educational patterns through their repetition, but it also invites criticism of one's own achievements, often expressed through philosophical dialogues and cultural or political debates. In turn, this necessitates the reinforcement of modern cultural imperatives, with a particular emphasis on the social significance of education as a key factor in the spiritual renewal of society [9].

These similarities between Humboldt and Skovoroda reflect broader patterns in European pedagogical thought, exemplified by earlier figures like Comenius [10] and Rousseau [11]. Like Comenius, Skovoroda sought to harmonize spiritual and practical knowledge through dialogue, though he rejected Comenius' systematization in favor of individualized, existential learning. Similarly, Rousseau's emphasis on student autonomy resonates with Skovoroda's anti-dogmatism, but Skovoroda's Christian-Platonic framework diverges from Rousseau's secular naturalism. This situates Skovoroda as a bridge between Renaissance humanism (Comenius) and Enlightenment critiques of institutionalized learning (Rousseau).

In the work of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda, this theme is seamlessly woven into his philosophical pedagogy, which is characterized by a clear autodidactic

focus. The overlap between the views of Skovoroda and Humboldt is most evident in their shared emphasis on the personal development of the student, whether as a learner or scientist, and in their anthropological interpretation of the principle of the unity of teaching and research. As V.A. Kurennoy notes, "University studies, according to Humboldt, should take place in solitude and freedom. ...The scientist, using his own powers, establishes his individual relationship with the 'world' and, through his studies, becomes a microcosmic reflection of the world" [12, p. 16].

While Humboldt's philosophical and educational ideas differ from Skovoroda's interpretation of the relationship between the world and the philosopher, there are notable similarities. Humboldt tends to place more pragmatic emphasis on these relationships, whereas Skovoroda takes a broader approach. Skovoroda is known to have understood the category of the "world" more expansively, not focusing on the new semantics of conquering or appropriating the natural world. Instead, he adopts a Renaissance view, seeing the world as a dynamic unity of both created and uncreated principles [13].

In Skovoroda's philosophical pedagogy, religious, secular, and post-secular meanings are combined in unexpected ways, which enhances their impact on those receiving his educational and didactic teachings. Skovoroda's teachings, heavily influenced by Platonism, are framed around his concept of three worlds—macrocosm, microcosm, and the symbolic world of the Bible—and two natures, visible and invisible [14]. This framework is further enriched by his use of the Socratic method, particularly with its emphasis on an individual, dialogic approach to students or pupils. His philosophical and educational dialogues are reminiscent of modern existential-anthropological philosophical pedagogy, utilizing metaphors extensively to provide greater communicative freedom in the implementation of educational practices.

Drawing from his own experience and in the spirit of Enlightenment philosophy, Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda describes the temporal structures of the educational process, not within formal institutions, but within the realm of informal autodidactic practices. He emphasizes that a student's love for learning is reflected in "virtue and Hellenic literature" [15, p. 229]. The learning process itself is depicted through various metaphors, such as a palm tree (the more it is constrained, the higher it grows) and the functioning of the stomach, the analogy of which is applied to the soul—requiring nourishment to be "fed little by little." Skovoroda's insights into the procedural nature and temporal rhythms of autodidactic learning reflect a new understanding of the teacher's role, where the teacher acts more as a consultant than as a strict mentor. He shares advice based on his own experiences: "The slower you study, the more fruitful the learning. Slow constancy accumulates more than expected" [16, p. 229].

In one of his letters, Skovoroda writes about the "conversation of the soul," describing it as a silent dialogue that the soul conducts with itself [17, p. 471]. He believed that this inner dialogue was an essential didactic technique, both in teaching and upbringing. Silent dialogue, which represents active listening to oneself, allows individuals to sift through personal knowledge and experiences. It also prompts one to reflect on philosophical questions, such as "What is

philosophy?" to which Skovoroda responds, "It is to be alone with oneself, to be able to conduct a conversation with oneself" [17, p. 472].

Critical self-reflection of one's own views and knowledge is a prerequisite for meaningful dialogue with others, indicating the inherent dialogism in Skovoroda's pedagogy. It is likely no coincidence that nearly all of Skovoroda's works include the word "dialogue" or its variants (conversation, talk, etc.) in their titles. His life itself can be seen as a dialogue, a space where different meanings meet, and where the understanding of human existence takes place [18]. Thus, dialogicity becomes a fundamental requirement in education, without which it is impossible to engage a person in different "worlds" of thought, to recognize the multidimensionality of human existence, which includes communication systems, cultural artifacts, and the processes of learning and education.

Dialogue plays a central role in directing philosophical and educational thought toward ideas grounded in the natural, human qualities (anthropologemes) of a person. A learning individual must have a fully developed environment, both spatially and temporally. This anthropological concept requires conditions that allow for the search for harmony between soul and body, man and nature, and knowledge and faith—elements that are unimaginable without self-knowledge, self-improvement, and reflection [19]. In this context, both the teacher and the student create a shared educational space for free learning. The teacher's role, in this case, is shaped by the logic of philosophical dialogue, including imagined dialogues. Skovoroda does not speak of the professionalization of teachers, viewing the encounter with a teacher as an existential event.

In the socio-cultural contexts in which Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda lived and worked, the practices of free and proto-democratic education could only be implemented in an informal educational setting [20]. The relationship between student and teacher in Skovoroda's pedagogy is defined by symmetrical communication, where the student is granted the right to make mistakes and then correct them [4]. However, Skovoroda's didactic approach is somewhat inconsistent, often guided by spontaneity. From advocating Enlightenment-era instructional methods, he frequently reverts to Renaissance ideas of learning as pure self-improvement, albeit with the risk of it becoming an end in itself.

Skovoroda views "knowledge of Greek and Roman literature, which is gained through night classes" as a tool or means for achieving self-improvement—describing it as a "means of means" [21, p. 167]. Paradoxically, this also shows that Skovoroda was both a carrier and transmitter of European culture, while not being a blind follower of European intellectual trends. His generalizations of European educational experience reflect the influence of the spiritual culture of Kievan Rus, where moral and ethical education played a crucial role. Skovoroda's life and work fit organically within this tradition [22]. In this regard, D.N. Kazakov observes: "The main aspect of Grigory Skovoroda's life and philosophy is not the apparent rejection of secular values and connections, but the independence of an individual who chooses his own purpose and future" [23, p. 64]. This independence is evident in the moral and ethical guidance that Skovoroda provides to his real and imagined students.

In Skovoroda's works, such exhortations take on a form characteristic of modern European culture, incorporating elements of critical philosophical and pedagogical reflection [24]. For example, we can reference Skovoroda's discussion on expensive versus free education, which his opponent (in the dialogue "Grateful Erodius," this role is played by Pishek, a monkey) characterizes as noble and base, respectively [25, p. 101]. However, in Skovoroda's philosophical pedagogy, "saving education"—based on Christian ethics and embodied in the concept of gratitude—is of fundamental importance. "Piety," as Skovoroda conveys through the character of Erodius, "is revered when gratitude is considered good. Piety is the daughter of gratitude. Gratitude is the daughter of faith" [26, p. 107].

Moral and ethical education, in Skovoroda's view, functions as a balanced communicative strategy. His skill in constructing philosophical dialogues is directed toward various educational goals, but ideological, moral, and ethical education hold a central place in his philosophical pedagogy [24]. For Skovoroda, philosophy is understood as an eternal journey in search of truth, happiness, and justice. This journey is shared by both philosophical teachers and students, yet each individual follows their own path when it comes to understanding the mysteries of existence and the pursuit of truth.

This may explain why Skovoroda often identifies human life with travel and man himself as a traveler. He writes, "We were born for True Happiness and the Journey toward it. And our life is a Path, like a Flowing River" [17, p. 503]. The concept of the "Path," borrowed from biblical texts, takes on new connotations in Skovoroda's works. One might even say that, in its semantic content, it approaches Confucian thought. Like Confucius, Skovoroda endows the "path" with qualities of individuality and uniqueness. In his works, a person chooses their own path, recognizing their own uniqueness and discovering the inexhaustible depth of their inner world. A person who embarks on the righteous path, according to Skovoroda, is capable of internalizing the highest moral ideals and being inspired by them.

It is no coincidence that Skovoroda's contemporaries referred to him as a "wandering university" or a "wandering academy" [25]. His wandering was more than just physical movement; it was a spiritual quest, a journey of self-knowledge, and a pedagogical practice rooted in spiritual teaching and preaching. It is not surprising that Skovoroda's educational activities often took place during holidays, at bazaars, and on the roads. Importantly, this "wandering" does not merely refer to empirical topography but rather to the topography of philosophical experience. Skovoroda creates an extraterritorial agora—a metaphorical public space—through which the educational landscape is expanded and democratized. This itinerant model prefigures later critiques of institutionalized education, such as Freire's [26] attack on hierarchical 'banking' pedagogy. However, where Freire systematizes dialogic praxis for political liberation, Skovoroda's focus remains on individual spiritual freedom.

In the early modern period, the practice of "wandering education" was quite widespread. However, Skovoroda's unique contribution was not only his cultivation of philosophical ideas among the broader population but also his

popularization of philosophical knowledge and his role in accelerating its institutionalization within universities [27]. Modern pedagogical science should also acknowledge Skovoroda's concept of "related labor," which forms a crucial component of his ethical teachings. This concept, in our view, serves as not only a methodological foundation for nature- and culture-conformity in education but also as a basis for self-reflection [28].

The principles of "affinity" correspond to the higher, rational, and just principles that define the meaning of human existence. When a person aligns their understanding of the meaning of life with the desires of "blind nature," they become enslaved by those desires, seeking things that nature has not given them—such as wealth or fame. This, according to Skovoroda, is not true happiness. Harmony with nature, achieved through "related labor," brings joy to the spirit, consolation, satisfaction, self-improvement, and peace of mind [17]. Skovoroda's emphasis on gratitude and 'related labor' parallels Noddings' [29] ethics of care, which posits that moral education flourishes in reciprocal, relational contexts. His dialogues exemplify her 'care as practice,' though his Christian focus lacks her pluralistic framing.

Skovoroda's pedagogy offers a provocative critique of dehumanized education through its emphasis on dialogue and moral growth, yet its informal, apolitical nature limits its applicability to structural inequities. While his 'related labor' aligns with Noddings' care ethics [29], and his dialogism anticipates Freire [26], his model ultimately serves as a spiritual counterpoint—not a pragmatic alternative—to standardized systems. His emphasis on dialogue, inner reflection, and the concept of "related labor" as the path to harmony between man and nature provides a framework for understanding both the individual's role in the educational process and the broader societal implications of learning. Skovoroda's methods, deeply rooted in moral and ethical principles, serve as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of education when it is aligned with the deeper purpose of human existence. His vision of democratizing education through philosophical engagement with everyday people remains highly relevant, offering valuable lessons for modern educational theory and practice.

However, Skovoroda's reliance on informal, relational pedagogy faces challenges in contemporary mass education systems. Standardized curricula, assessment regimes, and scalability constraints conflict with his emphasis on spontaneous dialogue and individualized *Bildung* (self-cultivation). While his methods align with Noddings' ethics of care [26] in prioritizing relational learning, they risk marginalization in neoliberal frameworks privileging measurable outcomes. Skovoroda's model thus serves as a critical counterpoint—but not a blueprint—for reforming standardized systems.

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [26] similarly critiques 'banking education' but, unlike Skovoroda, offers structured emancipatory practices (e.g., problem-posing dialogue). Skovoroda's lack of institutional engagement limits his applicability to systemic inequities Freire explicitly tackles. Both Skovoroda and Freire view dialogue as emancipatory, but Freire's conscientization targets structural oppression, while Skovoroda's 'inner freedom' remains apolitical. This divergence highlights tensions between spiritual and socio-critical pedagogies.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, even a brief analysis of the influence of Hryhorii Skovoroda's philosophy on his pedagogical views reveals that his philosophical reflection on contemporary educational and upbringing practices allowed for their examination across various ideological frameworks and socio-cultural contexts. Skovoroda the teacher and Skovoroda the philosopher are inseparable. His philosophical pedagogy, alongside his practical philosophy, is both responsible and provocative, representing a modern culture of freedom. While Humboldt formalized the research-teaching nexus, and Rousseau idealized child-centered learning, Skovoroda's synthesis of Socratic dialogue, Christian ethics, and informal practice offers a distinct model for moral education in non-institutional settings.

Skovoroda's ideas on upbringing, education, and training played a significant role in the development of Eastern European pedagogy. Since the late 18th century, prominent educators in Eastern Europe have, in one way or another, expanded on the key issues raised by Skovoroda: overcoming scholasticism and dogmatism in education, transitioning from religious to secular education, identifying and fostering individuals' natural inclinations and abilities, cultivating children's thinking, memory, and will, and nurturing high moral qualities such as hard work, goodwill, modesty, and love for their people. Moreover, Skovoroda emphasized the unity of word and deed, the implementation of general education, and the development of a person's high spiritual qualities—issues that remain highly relevant in today's world.

Skovoroda's legacy lies not in replicable practices but in his critique of dehumanized education—a challenge still unmet in neoliberal systems. Today's educators must respond to the challenges of the present, such as the influence of mass culture and the erosion of traditional values. In this regard, Skovoroda's ideas remain timeless, relevant, and continue to inspire future generations.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in the comprehensive analysis of the influence of Skovoroda's philosophy on his pedagogical views.

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