

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION COMPETENCE IN STUDENTS

Environmental awareness refers to the level of consciousness and knowledge individuals have regarding environmental issues and sustainability. Environmental awareness is an essential aspect of every individual's life. Humanity currently faces numerous problems and catastrophes caused by imbalanced environment, which, in turn, is caused by human interference in ecosystems and their actions.

Many people still believe their actions do not impact the state of the environment. Moreover, they question why they believe that they are not able to affect the process of environment degradation, since it is responsibility of the state to take care of such issues. There lies the gap between awareness and activism. So, there is a clear need to remove this gap and thus develop components of education for sustainable development contributing to action competence formation.

The problem is that even if the environmental problems are understood correctly and clearly, quite often people do not realize that contribute to the personally and every day. Nevertheless, most of the anthropogenic environmental problems can be managed by changing people's behavior. People can participate in activities, which directly benefit the environment or knowingly avoid actions, which harm the environment. Environmental awareness, environmental concern, and environmental attitude are three major influential factors that can help in improving the environmental behavior of people.

An environmentally competent person builds their habits and lifestyle with consideration of their impact on the environment, striving to minimize harm caused by this impact. This ability to transform knowledge into actions forms a specific environmental action competence. The general idea of modern ESD is to shift from building awareness to application of knowledge to real life changes. As a result, ESD aims to develop citizens who can make informed decision and take responsible action to solve the problem.

In order to study the level of environmental awareness and action readiness in students Ukraine and Germany, a survey was conducted during 2024-2025 with total number of respondents – 100 students. The survey included a set of demographic data, questions related to environmental awareness and the one dealing with action competence: participation in environmental organizations and campaigns aimed at environment protection (waste collection, planting trees, peaceful protests etc.), and their readiness to act in case some plans and programs in their locality obviously harm the environment.

Germans are generally more aware that they are involved in climate change and air pollution; moreover, they name global warming as the most significant environmental catastrophe, while Ukrainians focus on local consequences and mostly don't realize their personal contribution to climate changes. Among Ukrainians, there are more people who do not consider their impact on the environment at all (38.9%, compared to only 6.7% among Germans). This may be due to insufficient public awareness and poor information about how even our everyday life can negatively affect the global or local ecological system.

At the same time, Ukrainians showed a greater readiness for action, as evidenced by the following facts: 53.3% of Germans have never participated in environmental activities, while among Ukrainians only 36.1%. Also in Ukraine, people are ready to change their behavior in many directions, while in Germany the majority chose only to reduce meat consumption.

Thus, despite generally lower awareness and a range of prejudices, Ukrainians possess significant action competence, so in order to improve the environmental situation in Ukraine, it is necessary first and foremost to better inform the population about the causes of environmental problems and how they are involved in them. Greater emphasis on environmental education in institutions, starting from school and progressing via higher education can help in building environmentally sound behavior and scale it up from childhood to adult age.

Moreover, having high level of readiness for action, people must be given an opportunity to realize this readiness by introducing more convenient and accessible waste sorting methods, organizing more environmental campaigns and events that involve citizens, and introducing certain incentives or penalties, taxes and deposits so that people have additional motivation. But this must be done wisely, so as not to cause resentment or destroy the desire to act from the very beginning. Green activism and implementation of their environmental rights must be a part of conventional education and further – professional and domestic life.

So, having certain readiness to act Ukrainians can contribute more to the conservation of environment if they are better informed about their personal effects on the environment and provided with real ability to promote environmentally friendly decision making in their community.