



CHALLENGES OF UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PERIOD OF AGGRESSIVE WAR

ПРОБЛЕМИ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ УКРАЇНИ В ПЕРІОД АГРЕСИВНОЇ ВІЙНИ

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Abstract. *The article deals with the analysis of Ukrainian tertiary education characteristic features in the present period of Russian aggression. The author asserts that despite devastating war consequences, Ukraine has become a nation that quickly concentrated around the young people, taking into account that their education is the most important factor in the future development of the state. That is why Ukrainian tertiary education is undergoing such a rapid change in all dimensions, including reconstruction of the ruined buildings and transition of teaching and learning approach. The author grounds that supplying of an innovative educational environment with blended learning technologies is the most efficient way of providing continuous educational process even in the time of war.*

Key words: *Ukrainian tertiary education, reconstruction, transition, blended learning technologies*

Introduction.

Whether and how Russian aggression will continue to affect education in the post-war future is a critical topic for educators. The pandemic was the first catastrophe that forced educational institutions to indefinitely halt in-person instruction, ushering in an abrupt transformation for which the majority of students and teachers were unprepared [2]. It is heartbreaking that over 1,500,000,000 pupils all over the world from all educational levels were prevented from attending learning institutions because of required closings to stop the virus's spread [6]. The second crucial period to the Ukrainian education has become and still is Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022. It has had dire consequences for all the levels of education in Ukraine. In just two months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, over 4.9 million people fled their country [8].

The bloodshed war worsened access to education, deepened existing educational inequalities, negatively affected the quality of the educational process and students learning success, and also reflected on the psycho-emotional state of students and teachers [9]. All Ukrainian educational institutions suffered human losses. During hostilities or Russian occupation teachers, pupils and parents were killed and wounded. Hundreds of schools, colleges and universities were destroyed or damaged. Millions of young people and thousands of Ukrainian teachers were forced to change their places of residence within the country or go abroad. Every day, all participants in the educational process have to overcome the challenges of war: forced interruptions in education, shelling of territories, air strikes, power outages and many others [4]. So, to survive and renew, Ukrainian education system had to react adequately on these challenges.

The main part.

In such a way Ukraine has become a typical illustration of a nation that is



undergoing such a rapid change. As our research has demonstrated, according to the Ukrainian Constitution all inhabitants of this country have the right to free education at all educational levels [4]. It is logical to assume, that educational establishments in this situation must experience the transition to a distance or mixed form of learning. Therefore we observe that in those areas, where infrastructure is damaged, the first step that has taken by authorities was to provide means of access to distance education: the Internet, computers, power sources. It should be noted that it was not easy, but it was the learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic that made it possible to quickly adapt from the full-time to the remote or mixed format of teaching and learning during martial law [5].

If we now turn to tertiary education, we should stress, that traditionally in Ukrainian universities, classroom instruction was the basic teaching method. Our research demonstrates that in-person instruction was once discontinued in March 2020 after the first verified instances of COVID-19 were found in the nation, and both students and professors had to overnight switch to online instruction [7]. As we have already mention, the situation is worsen with the Russian invasion. The results of this study would seem to suggest that there was the second shift from traditional in-person instruction to online learning formats in higher education, caused first of all by the unprecedented closure of tertiary institutions as their students and teachers could not have the opportunity to continue educational process [6].

It is significant to highlight that, methodologically distance learning has both strong and weak sides. On-line learning still carries the risks of deteriorating the quality of education and academic performance, as well as deepening existing educational inequalities. In addition, distance learning leads to an increase in the load on students and teachers and a deterioration in the psycho-emotional state of the participants in the educational process [11]. University students had to get a rich experience and take part in the transition of higher education into an "e-learning workshop" both in Ukraine and other countries where online learning was implemented as a result of the pandemic [8]. Until that point, little effort had been made to support students' functioning in virtual learning settings, and even less had been put into instructing students on how to maintain appropriate online learning practices and etiquette [1]. Student reluctance to utilize their computer webcams, for instance, was noted without any awareness that this hesitation reduced their psychological engagement with the virtual classroom and the effectiveness of interactive learning [3]. Hence, students were ignorant of actions that defeat the aims of both the design and pedagogy of online courses [5].

Nonetheless, we connect this behavior with a negative impact of war on the psycho-emotional state of students and tutors. The majority of tutors (61%) believe that almost all students have symptoms of stress, such as poor sleep, anxiety, difficulty in concentrating, and problems in communication with their groupmates. Both students and educational staff have a high level of anxiety. Also, students feel lonely, because during forced vacations and distance learning, they lack communication with their tutors [9].

It should not be forgotten that wartime conditions also place an additional burden on tutors and university educational personnel: they have to spend more time organizing education during alarms and power cuts, as well as doing both teaching and



research work of colleagues who have left and supporting students who are abroad [13]. Unfortunately, psycho-emotional state of educational staff is rarely taken into account. Despite difficult working conditions and endless challenges, Ukrainian tutors, lecturers, professors try to adhere to the curriculum. To do this, they combine topics, reduce the number of tasks for independent study, and also use asynchronous learning - for example, they upload video recordings of lessons and educational materials to electronic platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, Prosvita, Padlet, Classtime, etc. [12]. However, teachers in the conditions of distance education do not have the opportunity to pay enough attention to all students. In addition, lack of live communication on both sides with students and professors influences on the reduction of teaching and assessment quality.

Our analysis shows that both because of the security situation and the ongoing problems of educational destruction, distance learning should become the educational merit but not the only. Although differences of opinions still exist, it appears that three primary tertiary education needs arose in the present situation.

The first priority is to ensure the widest possible access to tertiary education in universities and colleges. For regions where face-to-face and mixed education is possible, this is the construction and repair of shelters in campuses, as well as the arrangement of educational spaces in shelters, including for extracurricular activities.

For regions and communities where only distance learning is possible, it could be influenced and modified by integrating pedagogical principles, much like traditional methods of information delivery and assessment [7]. Hence, online learning could develop into a pedagogical innovation that interests students as much as in-person instruction if these ideas are appropriately included. Some undeniable advantages include the availability of knowledge and the noteworthy adaptability with which students are able to complete the work while having control over when and what to learn [10].

If there is no alternative way to educate our students, surely we should choose online teaching as it may lead to significant results because it presupposes a self-paced and student-centered approach [9]. In this sense, learners can feel that their institution remembers and takes care of them. So, feeling that they are not alone in the war time, they may succeed in online education if they concentrate not on the war problems, but on their fundamental technical abilities in addition to self-discipline, commitment, determination, and the capacity to manage their time [8]. It's important to note the beneficial effects of online learning on students' psychological states during emergencies. Virtual academic classes serve as students' anchor to normalcy and a chance to interact with people other than family members because social distancing practices weaken both their academic and social lives [2].

The second priority of Ukrainian tertiary education in war period is to restore the educational infrastructure for a return to full-time education in the university auditoriums. This study confirms the importance of face-to-face communication between students and instructors as the method of psychological treatment [4].

So, effective educational environment should not be only of distance format. Online learning environments have furthermore come under fire for enabling the redefinition, simplicity, and reduction of learning in order to forward the narrative of



the education technology revolution [10]. To put it another way, online learning may not be in line with fundamental pedagogical principles, assessment standards, and academic research [6]. Of course, the lack of in-person interactions between students and between students and instructors is the key factor in this low compliance [3; 7]. Its absence fosters feelings of loneliness, disconnection, and lack of belonging, all of which reduce learners' involvement in the learning process itself [4]. In an explicitly technologically mediated online learning environment, instructors frequently find it challenging to shift from the role of direct controller of the teaching process to the one of facilitator [1]. Moreover, empirical research has shown that face-to-face instruction provides significantly superior learning opportunities to all forms of online learning.

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that for the effective educational results blended learning is more preferable even in the period of war.

The third priority is to ensure universal access to quality education [4]. It also involves the creation of an educational environment that meets the requirements of the educational reform and state standards (architecture, hygiene, teaching and learning process, research and innovation, etc.) in all tertiary institutions. It is planned to be carried out with a wide involvement of funds from international partners and with a focus on the integration of Ukraine into the EU. At the same time, international organizations are already important partners of Ukrainian communities in restoring schools and ensuring access to education, taking over part of the repairs, providing computers, power sources and other resources needed by schools [4]. In addition, international and charitable organizations create opportunities for learning in conditions of destroyed infrastructure. For example, digital educational centers were set up with the help of SAVED in some educational institutions of Chernihiv and Kyiv regions to support students [9]. They give students the opportunity to periodically visit the facility for individual consultations and communication with each other and with teachers, even if it has been closed due to damage or renovations.

Conclusions.

To summarize, we must press the point that it appears inevitable that at present situation Ukraine is extremely focused on the field education, particularly its tertiary dimension. We can formulate the basic challenges in the direction of educational sphere restoration as the following: 1) overcoming war destruction, 2) rethinking and developing a new vision of tertiary education system in general, 3) creation positive conditions for the transformation of the educational institutions network, 4) improving the quality of education, 5) provision of an innovative educational environment, prioritizing on mixed forms of learning, 6) ensuring engagement and positive outcomes for all students and educational staff [4]. So, reconstruction and transformation of the higher education system in such difficult conditions, in our opinion, should be focused in content and time dimensions in three directions: first, support for educators, second, reinforcement of present and future students and third collaborative endeavor of all stakeholders.

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