

MILITARY AND SOCIAL THREATS AS DETERMINANTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. The article presents the results of an empirical study aimed at identifying the problems of higher education in Ukraine amid the current realities of military aggression by the Russian Federation and outlining prospects for its development in crisis conditions. It was found that the war has become a challenging ordeal for the student youth, negatively affecting their psychological, moral, and mental health, disrupting personal plans, and hindering professional development. The study identified the most significant military and social threats to the development of domestic higher education, according to the students. These include the decline in the level of education and quality of life for Ukrainians, the reduction in the intellectual level of students – attributed to the disruption of systematic learning and the predominance of online learning formats – as well as daily stress situations caused by military actions. The article emphasizes the optimistic outlook of the student youth regarding the future of Ukrainian higher education. This optimism is reflected in their clear awareness of the necessary changes, understanding of their essence, appropriate determination of educational development priorities, and aspiration for personal and professional fulfillment. Ultimately, this is expected to lead to the improvement of the educational space, European integration, and a successful exit from the crisis, despite military and social threats.

Keywords: higher education in Ukraine; teacher training; military and social threats; student youth

Introduction

The current socio-political situation in Ukraine is uniquely characterized by the multitude of complex military threats that constantly endanger its stability. Our country is experiencing a war initiated by the Russian Federation against our statehood, and profound changes are ongoing in all spheres of social life, driven by a fundamental reassessment of values. Consequently, there are certain contradictions in political and economic development that objectively generate threats to societal stability.

Higher education is a fundamental factor in the development of society and a key prerequisite for its effective functioning. Today, like other areas of the country's life, it is suffering serious losses and destruction. Military actions have led to a reduction in education funding, damage to and destruction of higher education institutions and infrastructure, forced displacement of teachers and students, and limited access to quality education due to the lack of safety, among other issues. All of this has a detrimental impact on students, teaching staff, and the organization of the educational process in higher education institutions. These challenges, caused by military actions, compel domestic educators to make active efforts to develop higher education institutions and to form their own advantages in training competitive specialists who can adapt to the changes occurring in the current educational services market. To outline the prospects for the development of modern Ukrainian higher education, it is essential to study the impact of existing military and social threats in the country.

Research review

The military realities Ukraine faces have significantly impacted all aspects of life, including education. The war has brought forth numerous threats that destructively affect students, teaching staff, the organization of the educational process, the material-technical base of educational institutions, etc.

As the conflict entered its active phase, researchers have intensified their studies of the challenges and threats encountered by Ukraine. In particular, this issue has been the subject of research by O. Achkasova, A. Polyanska, and A. Semenov (2023), S. Huseynov, N. Haranya, and K. Kolesnik (2023), V. Kremenya (2023), Y. Nikolaev, G. Rii, and I. Shemelynets (2023), N. Nichkalo, O. Ovcharuk, V. Hordiienko, and I. Ivanyuk (2022), S. Shkarleta (2022), and others.

In the study conducted among students of the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute," the focus was primarily on the psychological problems of students related to military actions. The youth paid attention to such issues as high levels of stress, anxiety and fear, neurotic conditions, loss of prospects, feelings of helplessness, loss of social connections, and the absence of the usual joys of student life (Holovakha & Makeyeva 2022, p. 204).

The problems of social security of youth in Ukraine in the conditions of martial law have become the focus of research by O. Achkasov, A. Polyanska, and A. Semenov (2023). The authors concentrate on such youth issues associated with the introduction of martial law in Ukraine: economic difficulties related to job loss, limited access to education and other resources; disruption of social connections, especially with family and friends; concerns about physical safety; epidemiological risks and issues with access to quality medical care; limited access to educational and cultural resources.

According to T. Marusyak (2022), the war has created several threats to Ukrainian education. These include: instability of learning conditions; psychological stress affecting the motivation of educational process participants; migration from regions with complex security situations or active combat operations, leading to overcrowding in large cities, including the overcrowding of educational institutions; lack of shelters in certain higher education institutions and student dormitories, posing a threat to health and life; inadequate provision of technological resources, internet access, and the need to improve the level of digital literacy of educational process participants; continuation of distance learning, resulting in reduced social contacts, seclusion, isolation, lack of opportunities for full-fledged teamwork, and communication.

The most comprehensive and systematic analysis of the issues of modern Ukrainian higher education is presented in the scientific-analytical report “Higher Education in Ukraine in Conditions of Martial Law and Post-War Recovery: Challenges and Responses” (Kremen 2023), which characterizes the following problems faced by Ukrainian education.

1. The threat to the lives and health of higher education students and staff. Obviously, this refers to both physical and mental health. Even students in relatively safe areas are constantly under air alerts and periodic shelling, which undoubtedly affects their psychological well-being.

2. In addition, the authors highlight the massive destruction and damage to educational infrastructure. Specifically, data from February 24, 2022, to September 28, 2023, show that 5 higher education institutions were completely destroyed due to bombings and shelling, and 88 higher education institutions from various regions of the country were damaged.

3. Another problem for the education sector has also become the necessity of forced relocation of higher education institutions. From March to November 2022, the locations of 19 higher education institutions in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions were changed.

4. The war has also had a devastating impact on the student body and the composition of academic staff. For instance, since the beginning of the war, 16% of students and 6% of educators have left Ukraine. The number of academic staff is also decreasing due to their transition to other fields, associated with a reduction in

allowances for academic degrees and titles, shortened vacation periods, redistribution of hours in study plans in favor of independent work, and reduction in the staff of higher education institutions. The report authors also draw attention to the issue of ensuring equal access to quality higher education in wartime conditions, which is hampered by damage and destruction of educational infrastructure, massive displacement of educational process participants within Ukraine and abroad, relocation of higher education institutions from frontline and occupied territories resulting in loss of material-technical, educational-research, and staffing potential, loss of ability for higher education students to pay tuition fees, increasing number of students forced to work to make a living after interrupting their studies, problems with energy resources and internet access, growing number of persons with disabilities, lack of funding for resources necessary to involve inclusive categories of students in the educational process, and shortage of properly equipped shelters.

5. Among the problems of higher education associated with military actions in the territory of Ukraine, there are also difficulties in conducting scientific and innovative activities, related to the lack of access to libraries, laboratories, databases; administrative and technical obstacles for financial operations; problems accessing research grants; inability to continue scientific activities by forcibly displaced scientists; restricted access to research and innovation infrastructure or its destruction; lack of funding; low level of commercialization of scientific results, technology transfer, and interaction between science and industry; insufficient alignment of scientific and technical products with market needs.

6. The authors of the scientific-analytical report “Higher Education in Ukraine in Conditions of Martial Law and Post-War Recovery: Challenges and Responses” also draw attention to limitations on international cooperation, linked to restrictions on Ukrainian men crossing borders, suspension or cancellation of certain projects under the Erasmus+ Program, unsatisfactory level of English proficiency among some researchers, and institutional disconnect regarding the internationalization of higher education.

7. In the conditions of military realities, the problem of graduates’ qualifications not meeting the demands of the labor market is aggravated, leading to a significant number of individuals with higher education in the labor market, a considerable percentage of whom are employed in positions that do not correspond to their qualifications.

8. An important issue complicating the functioning of the education sector is also the reduction in state budget expenditures on higher education. In February 2022, education expenditures were cut by 18.6%, and in the following year, by an additional 4.5%.

In addition to the enumerated problems, a number of others can be added.

9. Due to the fundamental changes in the personnel needs of the national economy and social life, there is a need to reorient the training of personnel.

10. Nowadays, a new challenge has arisen in overcoming the managerial, legislative, financial, methodological, institutional, and other shortcomings in the reform of higher education institutions, stemming from the lack of coordination in adult education (Shkarlet 2022, p. 163).

However, it is worth noting that when considering the losses and challenges for higher education in the conditions of martial law, researchers focus on new promising opportunities for the development of Ukraine's education sector. Specifically, T. Marusiak (2022), I. Shevchuk and A. Shevchuk (2022), H. Yelnykova, M. Zhuk, and S. Kretovych (2023), among others, have drawn attention to the wartime and social threats as determinants of the development of domestic education.

Specifically, among such positive prospects, researchers (including Marusiak 2022) mention: the restoration of educational institutions in a new, more modernized format; improvement of security capabilities of educational institutions (provision of shelters, training for staff and students in case of threats); digitalization of the learning process, expanding the use of various online platforms, teaching programs, knowledge acquisition, and assessment; development of online textbooks; cooperation with foreign educational institutions, exchange of experience, enhancing academic mobility; support from international organizations and governments of other countries in improving the quality of education; strengthening the national, cultural, and civic components of educational programs aimed at shaping Ukrainian identity, and so on.

Working at a higher education institution prompted us to contemplate the vision of modern students regarding the prospects of domestic higher education development. With this aim, we organized an empirical study, the results of which are presented below.

Methodology and results of the empirical study

In order to achieve the defined research goal, i.e. to explore the influence of military and social threats as determinants of the development of contemporary Ukrainian education, the study employed a number of research methods, namely: theoretical methods – analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, abstraction, generalization. They provided the basis for a detailed study of scientific sources on the specified issue; generalization and specification of the problems faced by education in military realities; outlining perspectives and directions for the development of the education sector in Ukraine in crisis conditions; clarification of the positions of educational process participants regarding the vectors of educational sector development; helped formulate research conclusions.

We additionally employed empirical methods, including observation of the educational process at the higher education institution and surveys of participants, with the data processed using statistical methods.

To analyze the military and social threats as determinants of the development of contemporary Ukrainian education, we conducted a study based on a survey of students at the Ivan Franko Drohobych State Pedagogical University. The survey involved 130 respondents aged 17 to 31. It is important to emphasize that our university's students come from various regions of Ukraine, many of whom moved to western Ukraine for safety reasons due to the military actions. The university enrolls students from areas of Ukraine currently experiencing active combat, with some territories still under Russian military occupation.

Students were categorized by age criteria, as illustrated in Figure 1.

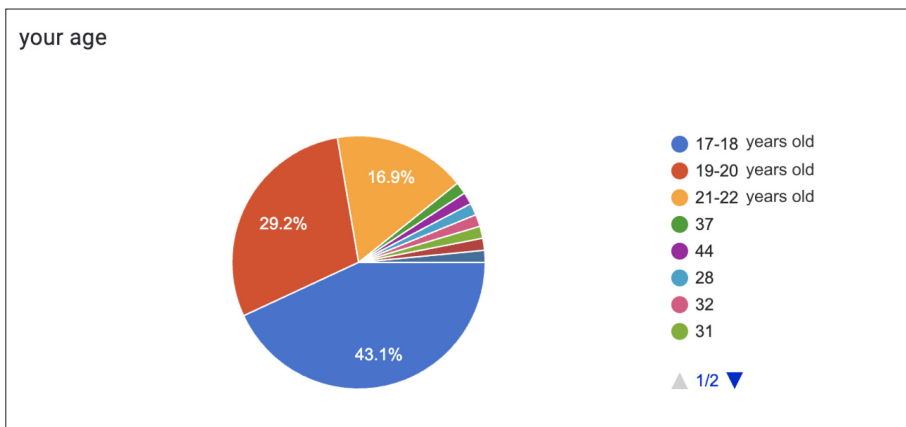


Figure 1

All our respondents are young individuals who are building plans for the future, pursuing both professional and personal development trajectories, have a good grasp of societal processes, and are clear about their life values. The war has become a significant test on their life journey, often prompting changes in their life plans and, to some extent, clouding their prospects.

In response to the question, "Have you felt the impact of the war in your life?" the vast majority of respondents (75.4%) answered, "Yes, very significant." Only 24.6% of students report feeling a minor impact from the war (Figure 2).

Our study also shows that there was not a single student who did not feel the impact of the war on their life at all.

Thus, we note that the war has affected every citizen of our country, regardless of the region they live in. This, in turn, leads to a correction of a person's life plans.

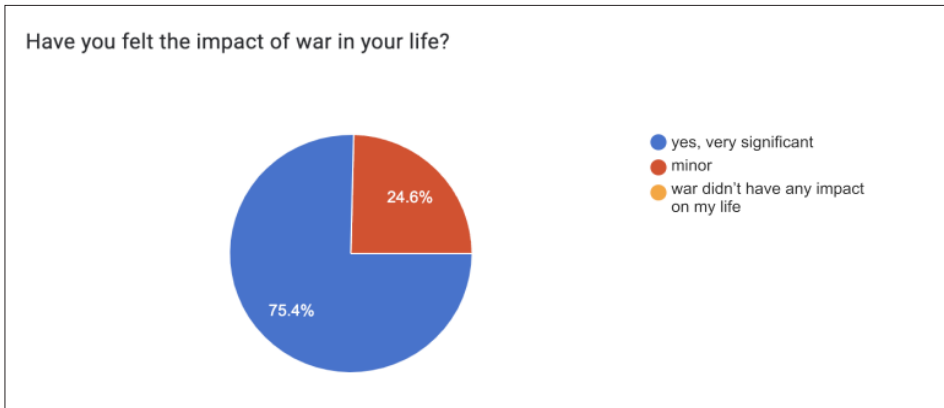


Figure 2

It was also important for us to determine which consequences of the war (personal, moral, material, physical, psychological, mental, etc.) are most challenging for young people. The thoughts and feelings of the respondents were distributed as follows (see Figure 3):

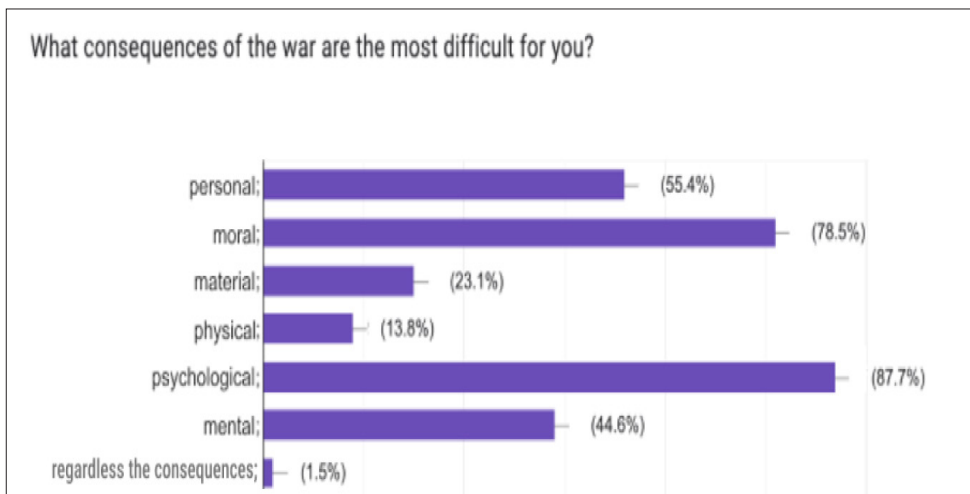


Figure 3

The survey indicates that the war has the greatest impact on the psychological, moral, and mental state of students; it significantly alters the personal plans and prospects of the youth. Almost a quarter of respondents mention changes in their financial status, although Ukrainian students are typically financially dependent on

their parents or relatives. This points to the pervasive influence of the war on all demographic groups in all regions of the country.

Separately, we sought to determine how the war affects young people's pursuit of education. The results are presented in Figure 4.

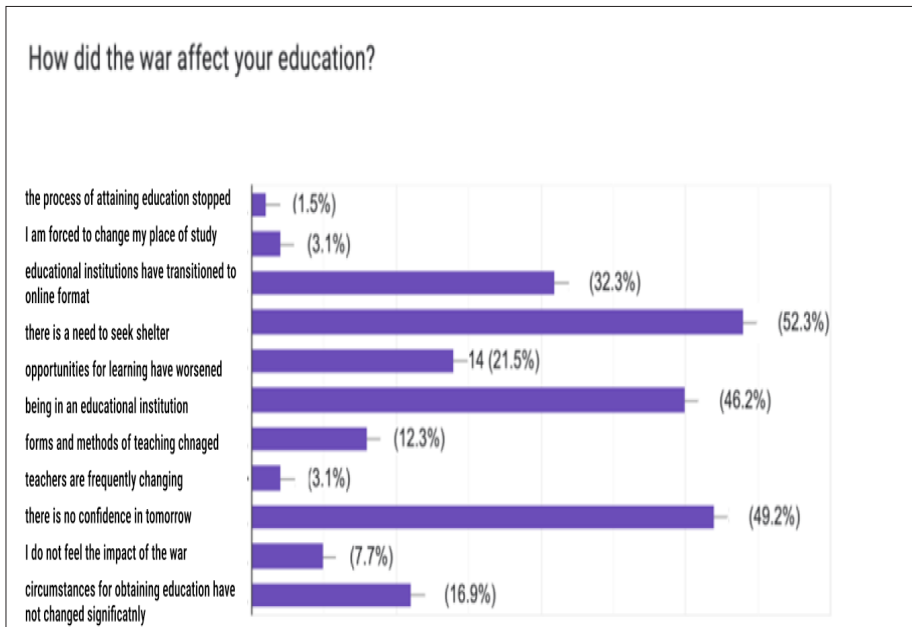


Figure 4

Our research indicates that military threats significantly impact the development of contemporary Ukrainian education. Primarily, this concerns the organization of the educational process. Students point out discomfort due to the necessity of moving to bomb shelters during classes. Moreover, staying in educational institutions creates significant inconvenience due to alarm sounds.

49.2% of the respondents feel a lack of confidence in tomorrow, significantly impairing the educational process. In our view, this factor has a particularly significant negative impact on the development of life plans and prospects for young people.

Respondents also note that among the significant factors affecting education development are the transition of educational institutions to online format (32.3%); worsened learning opportunities (21.5%); changed forms and methods of teaching (12.3%). Only 7.7% of respondents indicated that they do not feel the impact of the war on their education.

Among the insignificant factors influencing education development, the following were noted: “circumstances for obtaining education have not changed significantly for me” (16.9%), “the process of obtaining education has stopped” (1.5%); “I am forced to change the place of study” (3.1%); “teachers often change” (3.1%).

Thus, we note that the most important factors are organizational and personal, namely, uncertainty about future positive life prospects.

In the study, we also sought to determine how the war would affect Ukrainian education. The opinions of students were divided as follows (Fig. 5):

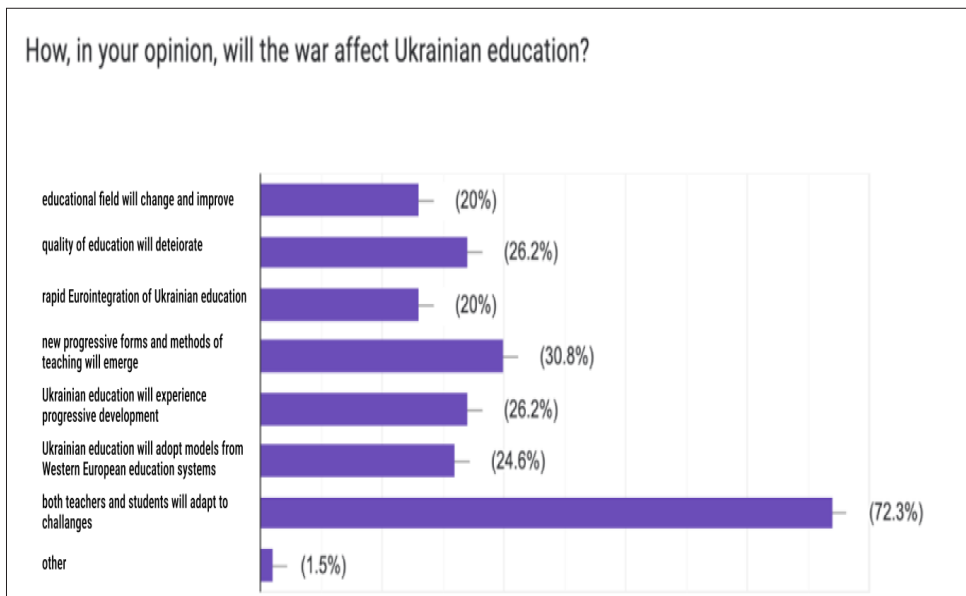


Figure 5

Our research convincingly indicates optimism among Ukrainian youth regarding the development of education in the post-war perspective – 72.3% of respondents believe that both educators and students will adapt to the challenges of war and overcome obstacles. 30.8% of those surveyed anticipate the emergence of new, progressive forms and methods of teaching; 26.2% expect progressive development in Ukrainian education; 24.6% of students predict that Ukrainian education will adopt models from Western European education systems. 20% of respondents anticipate changes and improvements in the educational landscape; 20% indicate a rapid Eurointegration of Ukrainian education. Among those surveyed, 26.2% predict a significant deterioration in the quality of education.

Therefore, our research anticipates a sufficiently optimistic and progressive future for our education. Such a mindset among the youth inspires hope for their active stance towards improving the educational landscape, Eurointegration, and successful navigation out of the crisis amidst military and social threats.

The awareness among young people of the need for changes in education and understanding their essence and relevant mechanisms is an important indicator of progressive societal development. One specific focus of our research addressed precisely this issue. Respondents were asked the question: “In your opinion, what should be changed in Ukrainian education?” The answers to which were distributed as follows (Figure 6).

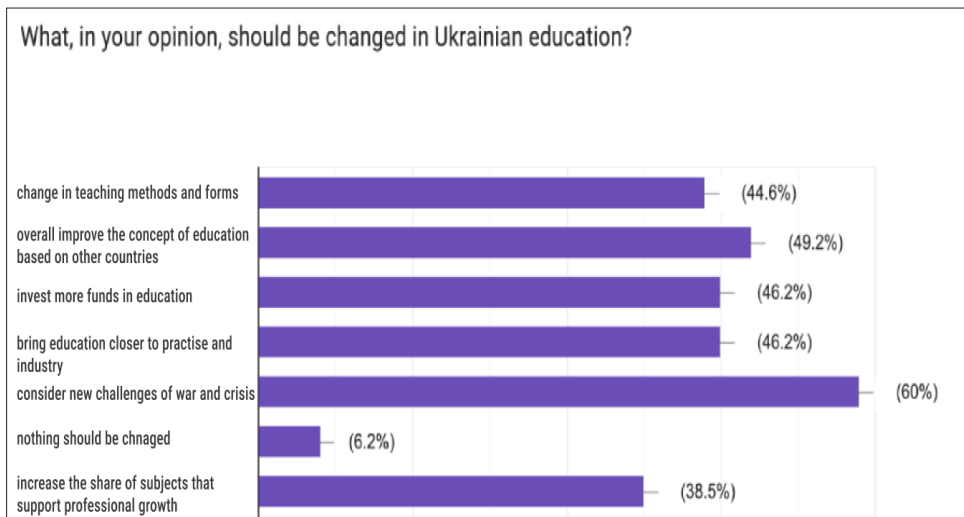


Figure 6

The vast majority of respondents believe that new challenges of war and crisis should be analyzed and taken into account (60%).

All other tasks have roughly equal importance for progress. Among them: generally improve the education concept based on the best practices of other countries (49.2%); invest more funds into education (46.2%); bring education closer to practice and industry (46.2%); change teaching methods and forms (44.6%); increase the share of subjects that enable young people to professionally assert themselves (38.5%). Only 6.2% of students believe that nothing needs to be changed.

Thus, we observe that higher education students have a clear understanding of the necessity for changes, comprehend their essence, adequately define priorities, and strive for personal and professional self-determination.

During the research process, we also aimed to clarify the understanding of the level of educational losses due to military and social threats. Assessments on this matter were divided as follows (Figure 7).

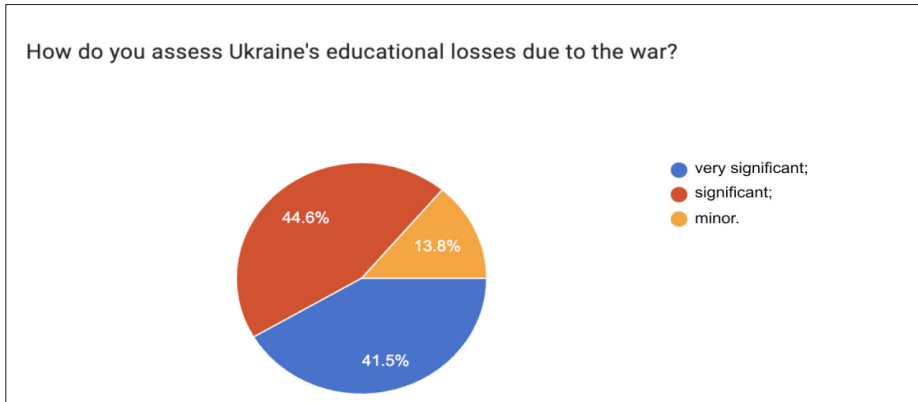


Figure 7

From the standpoint of educators, it was also important for us to investigate the level of student satisfaction with the educational process in order to improve it; opportunities for positive changes in educational programs; achieving better results in theoretical and practical training of specialists. The questionnaire included the question: “What do you like most about modern Ukrainian educational institutions?” Here are the responses we received (Figure 8).

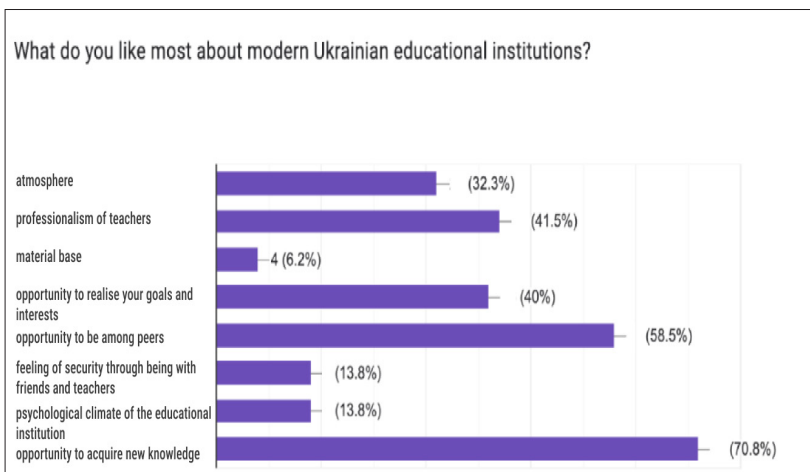


Figure 8

Almost all responses indicate the students' need for psychological comfort; the desire to focus on the educational process during times of tension and constant stress. Our students appreciate the opportunity to acquire knowledge and the high professional level of the educators.

However, the research highlights the necessity to improve the university's material base, which is quite challenging and unresolved during times of war and crisis.

In assessing the level and nature of social threats to education in today's conditions, we aimed to identify the factors that most affect the identified problem. The opinions of the respondents were divided as follows (Figure 9).

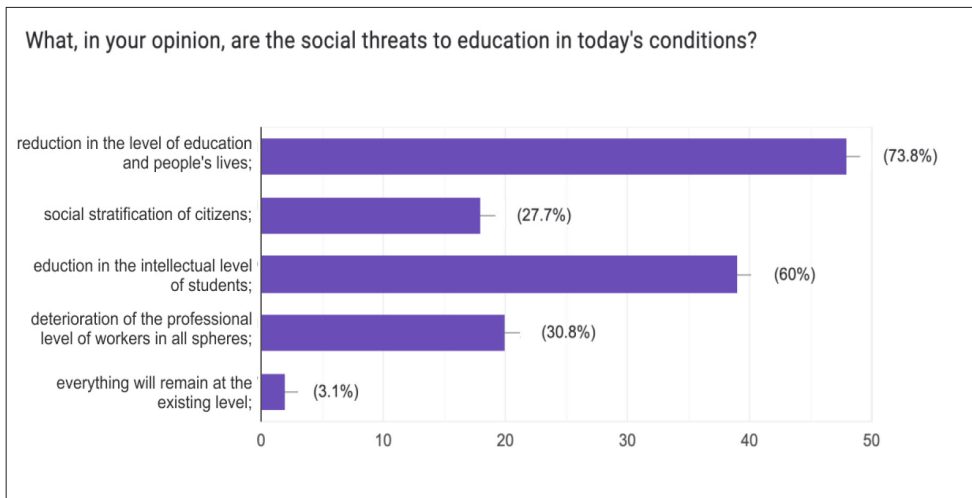


Figure 9

The greatest threats, according to students, are the decline in the level of education and people's lives (73.8%) and the decrease in students' intellectual level (60%). This is evidently determined by distance learning, stress, disruptions in the systematic nature of education, and so on.

In this sense, in our opinion, joint and coordinated action of all state institutions, civil society, and individual experts will be required to avoid educational losses.

Finally, to determine the nature of the forecast for the development of Ukraine, we proposed the following question: "What do you see as the prospects for Ukrainian education in the future?" (Figure 10).

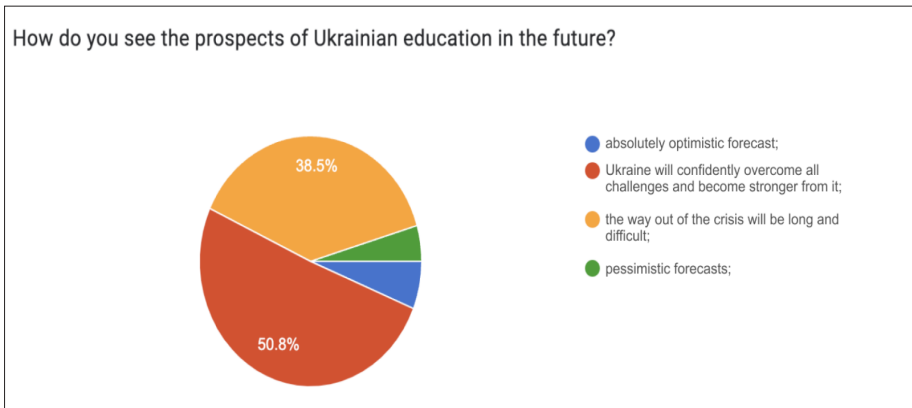


Figure 10

he responses provide grounds for further work for the benefit of the state, community, and each of its individual members.

More than half of the respondents believe that Ukraine will confidently overcome all challenges and emerge stronger from them. 38.3% of respondents said that the exit from the crisis will be long and difficult, but it will happen. In our opinion, this indicates the necessity of systematic and persistent efforts by every participant in the educational process.

Both absolutely optimistic and pessimistic forecasts were given by a very small number of respondents.

Conclusion

Thus, the review of scientific sources on the issue under study allowed us to summarize the results of its examination by contemporary researchers and outline the subject of our scientific inquiry, which aims to determine the military and social threats as determinants of the development of modern higher education in Ukraine.

The empirical research we conducted included methods such as observation of the educational process in higher education institutions and student surveys. Through these methods, we found that the war has been a challenging ordeal for students in Ukraine's higher education system, affecting their psychological, moral, and mental health, and disrupting personal plans and professional development prospects. The most significant military and social threats to the development of higher education, as perceived by students, include organizational and personal factors such as the decline in education and living standards, and the decrease in intellectual levels among students caused by distance learning, disruption of systematic education, and daily stressful situations.

However, our students remain quite optimistic about the future development of

Ukrainian education. They clearly understand the need for changes, comprehend their nature, adequately prioritize them, and strive for personal and professional self-determination.

In summary, the theoretical analysis of scientific sources on the issue under consideration, along with the results of our empirical research, demonstrate a consistent vision among the student youth regarding the future of domestic higher education. This is true regardless of their location, distance from conflict zones, and the extent of military and social threats. Importantly, students view these challenges as unique opportunities for a new beginning for Ukrainian higher education. This attitude among our youth inspires hope for their active role in improving the educational space, advancing European integration, and successfully overcoming the current crisis amid military and social threats.

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