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Hanna Bondarenko

Candidate of History, Associate Professor

V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University

4 Svobody Sq., 61022, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Email: abondarenko@karazin.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9991-7561>

**UKRAINIAN EDUCATION IN WARTIME:
CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS**

The article surveys the most acute problems and challenges that the Ukrainian educational system has faced since February 24, 2022 as a result of Russian aggression. For a certain time, the education of children and youth generally took a back seat to the basic task of survival. A significant proportion of Ukrainian children, especially displaced persons and refugees, had to miss school in the spring semester. However, despite the ongoing hostilities, educators are heroically continuing their work, even from bomb shelters. The most important problem facing school education is its transition from the domain of the state to the civil or personal sector. A child's education and its quality now primarily depend on the parents, their efforts and conviction in the need for education. The insufficient level of state funding negatively affects the entire education system, leading to a decrease in the number of teachers, lack of new curricula, lack of printed textbooks and educational materials, etc. Educational standards also suffer from the online format, which mostly

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presupposes self-teaching and requires self-discipline from students. Students lose motivation, and sometimes (especially at the elementary-school level) do not understand and are not able to absorb learning at all. The war is not over yet, and Ukrainian children and young people continue to live in constant psychological tension, with deep psychological trauma and fears caused by the war. A serious challenge for all educators and students is the impossibility of consistently teaching and attending online classes due to planned and emergency power outages that can last for many hours at a time. However, the search for a new format in which the Ukrainian educational system can be rebuilt and restructured is already underway. There is an active discussion of possible solutions to the problems of the Ukrainian educational system both at the international level (see for instance the International Conference on the Restoration of Ukraine, Switzerland – URC 2022) and within the country.

Keywords: war in Ukraine, Ukrainian educational system, online classes, New Ukrainian School, prospects of education.

The future of any nation directly depends on the state of the educational system. In order to find out the damage caused by Russian aggression to the education system of Ukraine, a variety of sources were analyzed and used: legal and normative documentation, informational materials, organizational, administrative and reporting documentation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, journalistic and analytical articles expressing opinions about those processes that have taken place in this area since February 24, 2022, as well as the author's own observations.

When analyzing the state of education in Ukraine during the war, a few words should be said about the spring semester of 2022, as it turned out to be the most difficult for Ukrainian education at all levels. When Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, all life came to a standstill; classes were suspended in kindergartens, schools and all higher educational institutions.

More than 10 million people were forced to leave their homes: 6.5 million relocated within the country, 3.9 million went abroad, and millions more were forced to hide in basements and bomb shelters. Most of these people were women and children (Nazarenko, Kohut, Zher'obkina 2022b). One month of war in Ukraine resulted in the displacement of 4.3 million children, which

is more than half of the country's child population (7.5 million). This figure includes more than 1.8 million children who moved to neighboring countries as refugees and 2.5 million who are now internally displaced within Ukraine (Ponad polovyna ditej 2022).

In the first months of the war, there was often no Internet, and also no electricity, water, gas and food, so the education of children receded into the background. Survival was the issue of the day. But from March 14 on, the study process gradually began to recover. It should be noted that all educational activities moved online. Due to the constant threat of air strikes and the shelling of cities, there was no permission for children to return to classes.

Children who relocated abroad also began to connect to these online classes. International organizations estimate that more than 1.1 million children left Ukraine for Poland, and hundreds of thousands also moved to Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Two million refugee children 2022).

Many teachers went abroad and also could not start work for a long time, because they were preoccupied with problems of everyday life. It is estimated that around 25,000 teachers have gone abroad (Shveda 2022). Undoubtedly, refugee children faced and still face many difficulties in continuing their education, especially those who ended up abroad. This includes the language barrier (which takes a lot of time to overcome), the difficulties of adapting to a new society, problems with gadgets and the Internet for regular online education, and traumatized mental health.

Children who left their homes but remained within Ukraine or their home region and acquired the status of “VPO” (internally displaced persons) faced similar problems. Against the backdrop of domestic problems (many people left with a minimum of things), in February-March shops, banks and pharmacies were closed in the regions that were under attack. In these conditions, it was also necessary to independently find a school and a teacher who taught online classes. It was difficult for children to concentrate on classes when the bombings and the howl of sirens were heard. In addition, children had to continue their studies with new teachers whom they had never seen before. Furthermore, the students did not know each other, since many were

newcomers from frontline cities; almost all classes were mixed. Not only new teachers, but also unusual assignments, not the same as those given by the old teachers, and new textbooks (after all, within the same school program in the same subject there can be 5 textbooks by different authors) created additional difficulties.

Therefore, the process of resuming the education of children in March-April 2022 fell entirely on the shoulders of parents, who had to look for a school, teachers, textbooks, and materials for the normal continuation of their children's studies and at the same time tackle everyday problems such as finding housing, food, and sometimes work. Olena Bondarenko, co-chair of the educational organization Parents of SOS, notes that, in general, public education in Ukraine ended on February 24 (Bilas 2022).

It should be emphasized that regions with active hostilities or those near the frontlines faced the problem of a shortage of teachers who left home or the country (Matiiash 2022). We would like to note the heroism of many teachers who continue to teach children even from bomb shelters (Kuklin 2022).

Many parents were unable to combine everyday life with school, which is why the Department of Education estimates that about 100,000 children (Overview of the current state 2022) never started school in the spring semester and missed the entire semester. For displaced children, the Ministry of Education and Science allowed the issuance of a certificate of completion of the school year, preserving student's grades regardless of where they graduated (Serhij Shkarlet 2022).

Many mothers who relocated abroad also failed to return their children into the Ukrainian educational system, due to unresolved problems with living conditions, jobs, and the like. However, since April-May Ukrainian children living as refugees in European countries were required to attend local schools. So many teachers and children ended up abroad that it was often possible to set up special Ukrainian classes. As early as April 2022, the educational ombudsman of Ukraine summarized the problems that children from Ukraine had to deal with while living abroad (9 najholovnishykh problem v osviti 2022). The first place was given to the problem of independently finding online Ukrainian schools ready to accept students from other schools and even cities

abroad. Of course, the language barrier turned out to be the most difficult for children, who often had to resume studies in a foreign language and based on a different curriculum. In a number of European countries, Ukrainian classes were established that taught Ukrainian as a second language; in other cases, students were taught half in the local language and half in Ukrainian (as a national minority language) (Nazarenko 2022).

None of this concerns the occupied territories of Ukraine: Ukrainian school education there has completely ceased (Nazarenko, Kohut, Zher'obkina 2022a; Osvita 2022).

The new academic year of 2022–2023 began on schedule, on September 1. In the western regions of Ukraine, it followed the offline format — that is, schools that could provide the premises necessary from the point of view of security began their work as usual, and the children returned to their desks. The eastern regions, due to the incessant shelling, began classes online only.

According to official data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of November 14, 2022, 12,924 schools are open in Ukraine: 7,764 schools operate in a traditional and mixed format, and 5160 online. According to the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine Serhiy Shkarlett, 4,031,537 students are currently attending school, including 1,013,951 full time and 1,124,695 mixed. Most of them (1,892,891) study remotely (Bil'shish' ukrains'kykh uchniv 2022). You can read about the state of Ukrainian school education, as well as the number of schools and students in the pre-war year 2021, in the analytical collection “Education in independent Ukraine: development and competitiveness. 1991–2021” (Osvita v nezalezhnij Ukraini 2021).

But already on October 10, 2022, after massive missile attacks on all cities of Ukraine, schools in the western part of the country temporarily moved their classes online due to high risk for children. Now in each region the local authorities independently decide if and when students should return to classrooms.

Today, the main problem for all levels of education is power outages, which take place for 3-6 hours a day every day. Shutdown schedules exist, but they change every week. The teacher may teach a class, but some

of the children cannot connect because they do not have power at home. Next week, the teacher has a scheduled outage during class, and now he/she can no longer teach. Unfortunately, the shelling of the infrastructure continues, which means that, in addition to the planned ones, emergency power outages occur for 8-12 hours, or sometimes 24 hours a day.

Another huge problem is the very limited budget for the next school year, 2023. The government has adopted a budget for 2023, and only 6 % of it is allocated to education. It was, for instance, officially announced that the state does not have the money to create and print textbooks for the next academic year for grades 5-12 under the New Ukrainian School program. The New Ukrainian School program has worked successfully for four years, but it appears that now it will have to be put on hold because of the war. UNICEF has promised to help finance the publication of a mathematics textbook for the 5th grade, and the Commission of the Council of Europe can help print Ukrainian language textbooks for the 5th grade (Koly nadrukuiut' pidruchnyky 2022). But this is not enough to continue the normal functioning of the school system.

Salaries of teachers in both secondary and higher schools are also dwindling, which leads to teachers being forced to leave their jobs. Thus a new problem appears — the lack of teaching staff (Matiash 2022).

The numbers of destroyed buildings of schools, institutes and universities are also frightening, with Donetsk and Kharkiv regions leading this statistic. A difficult question arises: where will the Ukrainian children study when the war is over (Ohliad potochnoho stanu 2022)?

Finally, we must still grapple with the problem that first emerged during the COVID-19 epidemic with its quarantines: the difficulty of adapting to online learning. In August 2022, an article was published on the official resource of the “Ombudsman of Ukraine”, based on a survey of parents of children who remained in Ukraine (25,230 parents took part in the survey) (Problemy schodo navchannia 2022). The share of parents who state that their child is not receptive to online learning is indicative: for students in grades 1 through 4 it is 1835 respondents (43 %), for grades 5 through 9-1678 respondents (39.3%), for grades 10 through 11-187 (4.4 %), and for institutions of higher education — 16 (0.37 %). Online learning is known to require a high level

of self-discipline and self-organization from students, since it can often be compared with “self-education”, which primary school students are not capable of.

As already mentioned, a significant proportion of Ukrainian children are now refugees and live abroad. Since September 2022, throughout Europe they must attend local schools with teaching in the local languages (Polish, Czech, German, etc.). Of course, it is extremely difficult for children to learn subjects not in their native language, which they have not studied before. But it should also be noted that many parents, realizing that they would have to return to Ukraine, agreed to simultaneously enroll their children in Ukrainian schools online. In the first months of the new academic year (September-October), many tried to combine an offline school in Europe with an online Ukrainian school, and failed to do this, primarily because it proved very difficult for most children to complete all assignments and have time to learn a new language. In addition, following European law, if a child is absent from school for more than 10 days without a valid reason (even when studying online), the school administration passes this information on to the police and the Children's Service (Onyschenko 2022b). Parents in this case can expect a significant fine and other troubles. Most often parents make a choice not in favor of the Ukrainian school. As a result, some children are withdrawing from online education in Ukrainian schools.

Analyzing the current state of primary and secondary education, it can be stated that its level is rapidly falling. Students skip classes against their will, parents are preoccupied with issues of survival and cannot pay attention to their children's education, schools work only online, and if the child did not have time or did not understand the material, he or she has little chance of catching up.

Education, in many ways, has become the concern of parents. If parents hire tutors and find time to do homework with their child, then they give at least some level of education to their child. Among other things, parents must provide their child with the necessary devices and Internet connection and set aside a separate room where the whole family will not make noise. But many refugees and internally displaced persons live with two or three families in one room, including children of different ages, and all of them have

online classes at the same time. Of course, even in these conditions, you can find positive moments. For example, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, volunteers and teachers are developing many online platforms and channels that are aimed at helping teachers, children and parents in mastering the school curriculum and raising the level of education. It should be said that the civil sector has become involved in the problem of Ukrainian education as never before. Some educators see this as a key to success, and some remain convinced that the educational system should be under the control of the public sector. In particular, through various media resources, the idea is increasingly heard that the problems of education and its reform should be attended to by the state and not by the “civil sector” (Vakulenko 2022). But even numerous online programs, platforms and YouTube channels are ineffective when the population does not have electricity and the Internet for days.

It is also worth noting that, despite all the problems, the Internet coverage in Ukraine is reliable, almost ubiquitous and relatively inexpensive. Parents in almost all segments of Ukraine’s population have many opportunities to connect to online classes. Even when there is no electricity, if it is for no more than 4 hours, mobile Internet performs at a decent level.

Higher education and its state during the war is a subject in its own right. According to the official data of the Ministry of Education and Science, as of October 21, 2022 more than 141,000 persons were enrolled in institutions of higher education for bachelor programs based on complete general secondary education (63,663 students receiving budget funding and 77,791 students on a fee-for-service basis) (Ohliad potochnoho stanu 2022).

Since the beginning of the war, many higher education institutions of Eastern Ukraine have been evacuated (Dva 2022; Skrypnyk 2022), but there are those that decided to stay even in front-line cities. For example, Karazin Kharkiv National University is a stronghold of education and culture in difficult times of war. Of course, the number of students has decreased, but despite this, universities of not only Kyiv and Lviv, but also Kharkiv, Dnipro and Odesa continue to rank high in popularity among applicants (Onyschenko 2022a).

Today, all universities and institutes in Ukraine work exclusively online. Their problems are similar to those plaguing secondary schools. First, power outages create difficulties for both teachers and students. Second, many Ukrainian students are now abroad. Having fled from Russian aggression in winter and spring, they stayed to study at European universities, which generously provided enrollment opportunities and scholarships for Ukrainian students. These students left Ukrainian universities, many of them forever. Of course, there are some students who are trying to combine their education in Europe with online studies at Ukrainian universities.

As for international students, their number has fallen dramatically. We can only hope that this year the Medical School of Karazin Kharkiv National University will have at least 50 first-year students. As for second, third and other years, most of the foreign students withdrew their documents and left. This happened despite the fact that the university has signed a number of agreements with European and Turkish universities, including medical ones, on the basis of which our international students can continue to fully study offline, and, importantly for medical students, continue to practice in the classroom.

There is already a debate and active discussion around the question, “What should education be like after the war?” For example, at the international level, on July 4-5, 2022 Switzerland and Ukraine co-hosted the International Conference on the Reconstruction of Ukraine (URC 2022) (Proiekt Planu vidnovlennia Ukrainy 2022). At this conference, a global plan for the restoration of Ukrainian education was presented, extending until 2032. The main principles of this project are: “1. Total digitalization — Unified database of educational data. 2. EDID — Electronic educational passport (all information about a person's education in a smartphone). 3. SUN — “SCHOOL FOR THE UKRAINIAN NATION”. State distance school in Uber format (Proiekt Planu vidnovlennia Ukrainy, 9). An interesting explanation about the new school format is given: “This school does not have full-time teachers. In this school, the teacher works with the student when the student needs it” (Proiekt Planu vidnovlennia Ukrainy, 10). Of course, such a thesis is difficult for the Ukrainian public to understand and accept. The full introduction of the “New Ukrainian School” and updating of the state

standards of general secondary education are planned to be completed by 2032.

Discussion of the restructuring of education is also taking place at the national level. For example, Mykola Skyba, an expert at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future, is convinced that Ukrainian society will suffer from problems in the education system for a long time to come due to the different experiences of students and teachers (Miroshnikova 2022). The expert is convinced that Ukrainian education should be based on “difference of experience”, accepting the fact that it is impossible to homogenize knowledge and skills. The author proposes to use students’ skills and experiences in the classroom, when one student who has lived in a shelter will teach everyone how to filter water, another one who was a refugee in Poland will talk about how similar Ukrainian and Polish words are, and together the students will discuss geography, how some of them “traveled the world” as refugees, etc. As the author points out, this is the principle of education: “As for the benefits for students, then, firstly, relying on experience is therapeutic, and secondly, soft skills are developed during work. And there will also be an unexpected increase in non-standard skills among schoolchildren” (Miroshnikova 2022).

But it is worth questioning such an “exchange of experience”, since in most cases the experience of “filtering water in the basement” or “traveling as refugees in Europe” is difficult and sad for the child and carries negative associations. Classes will turn into a re-experiencing of traumas and fears. And the question remains, what is the place of the teacher in this model? Or should the teacher become a psychologist?

The ex-head of the Secretariat of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Associate Professor at NaUKMA Mykhailo Vinnitsky believes that discussion of the school curriculum is not a matter of writing a program for the New Ukrainian School, but a matter of completely changing the infrastructure of schools.

The author proposes to separate the secondary school, grades 8-12, into an entity of its own (Vynnyts'kyj 2022). Moreover, “such schools should become centers of social (artistic, scientific, sports) life not only for students, but also for parents and other adults, because they accumulate various infrastructural needs of society” (Vynnyts'kyj 2022).

Former Minister of Education of Ukraine Liliya Hrynevych, speaking in an interview about the future of Ukrainian school education, emphasized the need for continuing reform in secondary schools, in particular for the development of the New Ukrainian School program for grades 5-12. Also, the former Minister of Education believes that for elementary schools conditions should be created for resuming offline learning in the classroom, and for this it is necessary to re-equip Ukrainian schools and create an appropriate level of shelters (Shveda 2022). But there exists a view that distance education is the education of the future, and therefore Ukrainian education should tackle digitalization issues and develop the distance component in order to be “more interactive, exciting and encouraging to deepen knowledge in order to provide Ukrainian applicants with competitive advantages in the global educational arena” (Bilas 2022).

Serhiy Horbachev, Education Ombudsman of Ukraine, notes that the main problem now is calculating and making up for educational losses, since the problem is clear: it is necessary to determine “how a person can get a quality education, in poor quality/difficult conditions” (Onyschenko 2022 b). Serhiy Horbachev also considers the creation of an educational system similar to that in Europe as a top priority in the process of transforming school education in Ukraine after the war, since many Ukrainians were able to see and compare Ukrainian and European school education (Horbachev 2022).

It is true that future Ukrainian education will not be the same as before the war, but discussion of the transformation and reform of the education system cannot be postponed until “after the war”; it should take place now, given more than nine months of war experience.

Summing up, it should be said that both secondary and higher education in Ukraine suffer today from common problems that put all participants in the educational process in difficult conditions.

First, a serious test for the system is power outages and the absence of the Internet, which threatens all online education (the only form currently available in most parts of the country).

Second, a child’s education depends entirely on the parents, on their efforts and conviction in the need for education. If the parents are willing to spend their time and resources on overcoming the difficulties of wartime online

education, then the child has some chance to acquire the basic knowledge necessary for his or her age. Education largely ceases to be a public domain and moves into the “civilian” or private sector.

Third, the educational sector suffers from the problem of insufficient funding. The budget is limited and the salaries of teachers and educators are low; the development and publication of textbooks for the New Ukrainian School program is underfunded.

Fourth, there is a catastrophic decline in motivation among students, who do not see the practical benefits of education and often do not take online education seriously.

Fifth, students who have experienced and, unfortunately, continue to experience psychological upheavals are mentally vulnerable. Teachers cannot act as psychologists and cannot pay individual attention to every student. Schools need to think about separate sessions in which specialists could deal with the psychological health of children.

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Ганна Бондаренко

кандидатка історичних наук, доцентка

Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна

Майдан Свободи, 4, 61022, Харків, Україна

Email: abondarenko@karazin.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9991-7561>

УКРАЇНЬСЬКА ОСВІТА У ВОЄННИЙ ЧАС: ВИКЛИКИ ТА ПРОБЛЕМИ

У статті представлено огляд найгостріших проблем та викликів, які постали перед системою української освіти з 24 лютого 2022 р. внаслідок російської агресії. На певний час навчання дітей та молоді взагалі відійшло на другий план, оскільки пріоритетним стало питання виживання. Значна частина українських дітей, особливо переселенців та біженців, змушені були пропустити навчання у весняному семестрі. Однак, попри продовження бойових дій, освітяни героїчно забезпечують освіту дітям навіть з укриття. Найголовніша проблема, що постала перед шкільною освітою, — це її перехід від сфери впливу держави до громадянського чи особистого сектору. Освіта дитини та її якість тепер передусім залежать від батьків, їхніх зусиль та переконаності в необхідності навчання. Недостатній рівень державного фінансування негативно впливає на всю систему освіти, що призводить до зменшення кількості вчителів, відсутності нових навчальних програм, нестачі надрукованих підручників та навчальних матеріалів тощо. Погіршення рівня освіти відбувається і через онлайн-формат, який здебільшого передбачає самоосвіту та самоорганізацію

учнів. Учні втрачають мотивацію, а інколи (особливо учні початкових класів) взагалі не розуміють і не здатні сприймати навчання. Війна ще не завершена, і українські діти та молодь продовжують жити в постійній психологічній напрузі, з глибокими психічними травмами і страхами, спричиненими війною. Серйозним викликом для всіх освітян та учнів стала неможливість проводити повноцінні онлайн-заняття через планові та аварійні вимкнення світла, що можуть тривати багато годин поспіль. Водночас відбувається пошук формату відбудови та напрямів реформування української системи освіти. Ведеться активне обговорення шляхів розв'язання проблем української системи освіти як на міжнародному (Міжнародна конференція з відновлення України, Швейцарія – URC 2022), так і на загальнонаціональному рівні.

Ключові слова: війна в Україні, українська система освіти, онлайн-заняття, Нова українська школа, перспективи освіти.

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