

HIGHER EDUCATION DURING THE WAR TIME IN UKRAINE

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Summary

The war in Ukraine has changed the life not only for the Ukrainian citizens, but also the people all around the world. The first days were incredibly awful and the disaster was so huge that nobody (nor lecturers not the students) could even think about the process of studying. The fight for surviving has begun.

Two week in the beginning of March, 2022 were out of studying (all the students had so called “unexpected vocations”). It is clearly that many foreign students gave up studying in Ukraine after the 24th of February, 2022. But, in spite of our grief, even a lot of foreigners desired to continue online studying at Ukrainian universities. There are many students who gave up studying in Ukraine not believing in future perspectives here.

In the condition to save the life Ukrainians have to continue their everyday work to avoid economic and social collapse in the country in all spheres of agriculture, industry, education, culture, etc.

The war time makes us change a lot: widen the methods of distance learning, differentiate the individual studying, using different psychological methods to avoid panic attacks during air alarms in the period of classes, often blackouts in almost all regions of Ukraine, etc. As a result, we have to provide the online studying to supply educational service even in the war time to save the university structure, the working positions, to prevent scientific potential being destroyed.

Key words: foreign students; war time; Ukrainian language; distance studying; online education; higher education institution.

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1. Introduction

Foreign citizens can study in more than 240 institutions of higher education in Ukraine and obtain higher education in various specialties. The main languages of study at the Higher Education Institutions of Ukraine are Ukrainian and English. Every year, educational institutions of Ukraine invite students from more than 150 countries.

The state enterprise “Ukrainian State Centre of International Education” (USCIE) takes care of foreign students who are getting higher education in the higher education institutions of Ukraine. The enterprise was established in 2003 and belongs to the sphere of management of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. USCIE popularizes Ukrainian education abroad, provides informational, methodological and other support for the education of foreign students, works on the development of international cooperation, and engages in analytical activities. The Ukrainian State Centre for International Education ensures an operational exchange of information between all participants in the educational process, central bodies of executive power, and the diplomatic corps (5).

The *scope* of this research is to analyse the situation of higher education in Ukraine (on the example of Sumy National Agrarian University) for the Ukrainian students and foreigners

and predict its further development. The *goal* of this article is to point out the peculiarities of education process in Ukrainian universities in a whole and Ukrainian language studying as a part of it during the war time in Ukraine.

In this article the comparative and chronological methods have been used to demonstrate the specific changes and the real up-to-date conditions with educational process especially in the part of studying for foreign students in Ukraine.

The second aim of this article is to point out the main features of Ukrainian language studying during the war time in Ukraine to show the up-to-date conditions and program the further plans.

In modern conditions there are three ways to study in Ukraine: the e-learning and the distant studying, asynchronously with Viber and e-mail checking (this way is used because of air alarm and blackout, when the studying process is interrupted).

E-learning is a system of learning built using information and telecommunication technologies, which are widely used by both students and teachers in modern conditions. The e-learning system allows teachers and students to provide teaching courses, receive information and interact with each other only through the Internet, regardless of time and location. All coursework and communication is done via e-mail, forums, chat, or video conferencing. Some educational institutions call this type of course “fully online”. E-learning can be used online or in a classroom where students take a course with an instructor but only interact with the instructor online. With such training, students have unlimited access to content and the results of the course, program or degree are provided online. On the other hand, e-learning allows students to use virtual conferencing software such as Zoom, Google Meet, Skype Meet Now, Cloud Meeting, and many others to communicate with their instructors face-to-face over the Internet (*Lohvynenko: 59*).

Distance learning is a form of organization of the educational process that, due to the use of information and communication technologies, can be implemented both in conditions of geographical distance between the student and the teacher, and directly at the university for the formation of the student's independent activity in mastering the study program by specialty (*Kulaha*).

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine during the war time give the following definition of distant studying: “Distance learning is an individualized process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and methods of cognitive activity of a person, who occurs mainly through the mediated interaction of remote participants in the educational process in a specialized environment that functions on the basis of modern psychological and pedagogical and information and communication technologies” (Report).

Both of these methods are used during the war time in Ukraine. But some regions that are fully destroyed, have no chance to study at all: some of the students have moved to another region/state; some are studying in distance when they have a chance; the others are still abandoned.

Nowadays a lot of publications in relation to the topic of this article appear on the scientific field of different journals, papers, newspaper issues, etc. either in Ukraine or abroad. Concerning this article, they can be divided into two main groups:

1) the war in Ukraine: Institute for the study of War (ISW) – Ukraine Crisis Coverage (Frederick W. Kagan, Mason Clark, George Barros, and Kateryna Stepanenko. Forecast series: Putin’s Likely Course of Action in Ukraine. Updated Course of Action Assessment); Grace Mappes, Madison Williams, Yekaterina Klepanchuk, Angela Howard, Karolina Hird, and Frederick W. Kagan. Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 29) (6); *Wojciech Kosci*.

Thousands of Ukrainian students find peace in Poland (26th of November, 2022) <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20221118120910683>;

2) the higher education in war time in Ukraine: *Vasyl Kremin, Volodymyr Luhovii, et.al.* On The Work of the Departments and Scientific Institutions of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine Under the Conditions of Martial State (February-August. 2022). (Herald of the National Academy of Educational Sciences in Ukraine. 4(2). 2022); Education of Ukraine under martial law. Innovative and project activity: Scientific and methodical collection. Edited by Serhii Shcarlet. Kyiv-Chernivtsi. 2022. 140 p.; The University in Wartime: Educational Transformations (the portal of Lviv University: <https://lnu.edu.ua/universytet-u-chasi-viyny-osvitni-transformatsii/>); Ukrainian Institutions of Higher Education During the War (the portal of Sumy National Agrarian University: <https://snau.edu.ua/ukra%D1%97nski-zakladi-vishho%D1%97-osviti-pid-chas-vijni/>).

2. Foreign students during the war time in Ukraine (SNAU)

Sumy National Agrarian University (SNAU) is a young educational institution, established in 1977 as a branch of Kharkiv Dokuchaev Institute of Agriculture. Now this university is a center of agricultural education not only of Sumy region (the North-Eastern part of Ukraine), but also of Poltava, Chernihiv regions. According to the official statistics we have 6800 students, 500 lecturers (Professors and Associate Professors, Senior lecturers, lecturers).

Last fourteen years SNAU has educated hundreds of foreign students. But the situation was changed by the war on the 24th of February, 2022: Yuriy Danko, the Vice-Rector for Research Work of the Sumy National Agrarian University, spoke with a wide-ranging story: “On the morning of February 24, Russian tanks crossed the state border of Ukraine. Our Sumy city is 40 km from the border, and at that moment the main question of determining what to do at this moment arose. Tanks are nearby, and we have to manage the process. I will emphasize two key points that distinguished the Sumy National Agrarian University from other higher education institutions: in addition to Ukrainian students, at the time of the beginning of the Russian aggression, 72 Chinese students and a total of 150 foreign students remained on the territory of the educational institution, who needed our support. The second key point is that we are an agricultural university, where there are biological objects that also suffer from war” (*Danko*).

There are some peculiarities of the process organization: foreign students have left Ukraine and now they are living in the countries of Europe (Hungary, France, the Great Britain, etc.), and also in India, China, Africa. Some of them were deported before the 24th of February, 2022 and some of them were deported after (Chinese students). Many African students preferred to stay in the European countries, they began to work to have money for living and studying.

The university authority provided all necessary support for the first weeks of the war: psychological, food security, accommodation, home delivery, etc. The last group of students who left Ukraine in March, 2022 was the Chinese and Indian students.

In the beginning of the 2022–2023 studying year we have small groups of foreign students, sometimes the real number is only one student in a group. As usual they stay home (India, Africa, European countries, China, Turkey), they are safe, they support the lecturers in Ukraine, and they are still the students of SNAU.

But many students have left their universities trying to continue studying in a safer country (Poland): “In the 2021–22 academic year, there were some 36,000 students from Ukraine in Polish universities and other higher education institutions, making up nearly 42% of all foreign

students in Poland, by far the biggest group. On top of that number, there were an estimated 150 PhD students from Ukraine. In the first few weeks after the war had broken out, Polish universities received close to 5,700 applications from Ukrainians looking to become students in Poland. Nearly 100 PhD students also applied” (*Wojciech Kosci*); Great Britain: “Ukrainian refugees studying at English universities will face the same fee status as domestic students, it has been announced. In a letter to higher education institutions, universities minister Michelle Donelan says the government is extending access to “The student support, home fee status, [and] tuition fee caps” to Ukrainian refugees who had been given leave to stay in the UK. It means Ukrainian undergraduates studying at English institutions will not be charged more than £9,250 a year – instead of international fees, which can be much higher – and will have access to student support such as loans” (*Simon Baker*).

These two examples have showed the incredible support of Ukraine abroad from the one side and the decreasing of student number in Ukrainian institutions from the other side.

But nevertheless, Ukrainian system of higher education is still working. Through the constant blackouts nowadays in Ukraine the lecturers and the students are progressing in a studying process using also e-mailing and Viber a lot. In some way the pandemic of Covid-19 “helped” us prepare for distance and e-learning, thus, war time became an aggravation of the previous hard 2-year period. Thanks to Internet connection (Elon Musk’ Star links, in particular) teaching staff provides educational service to all the students both in Ukraine or abroad.

It is unbelievable, but pandemic of COVID-19 nowadays is a way to prepare for distance studying during the war time in Ukraine. According to UNESCO, almost 1.5 billion people seeking education were forced to stay at home, as a result closure of educational institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the factors affecting the quality of distance learning can be divided into:

- a) factors related to the professional and personal qualities of the teacher (ability to implement online-studying, necessary competencies for the implementation of this form of studying);
- b) factors related to the organization of distance education in a higher education institution (access to the necessary materials, quality of technical equipment, Internet speed);
- c) factors related to the student of education.

So, the question of researching the factors affecting the effectiveness of distance learning in institutions of higher education remains relevant and requires detailed research (*Shemyhon: 118*).

The war in Ukraine had started in 2014 by occupation of Donbass region and the Crimean Peninsula long before the brutal invasion in 2022. A lot of young people went to war, but there is great amount of potential defenders, who are not ready to die, who does not feel inner confidence about the readiness to defend their motherland at the cost of his own life, many of them don’t have the ability to kill the enemy.

Thus, in such a condition our universities have overtime enrolment of students of three main categories:

- 1) the first year students (the second higher education) (90% -men);
- 2) the Master’s degree students (99% – men);
- 3) the PhD students (75% – men).

A lot of them are studying on the commercial basis that gives additional financial support to the universities, on the one hand, but it greatly increases the number of Ukrainian students in the academic groups, on the other hand, – this is an additional burden on the lecturer. There are the examples of groups where the number of PhD students and Master Degree students is more than one hundred (130 and 115, respectively).

3. Teaching staff for foreign students during the war time in Ukraine

Before the war more than 150 foreign students were studying at Sumy National Agrarian University (SNAU). The most common and demanded faculties for the foreigners were: the faculty of Economics and Management, the faculty of Veterinary Medicine, the faculty of Civil Engineering, the faculty of Agrotechnology and Natural Resource Management. Mostly, the platform of our university was used as an open way to the European society.

Due to the decreasing of the number of foreign students the teaching staff has also been reduced (Fig. 1).

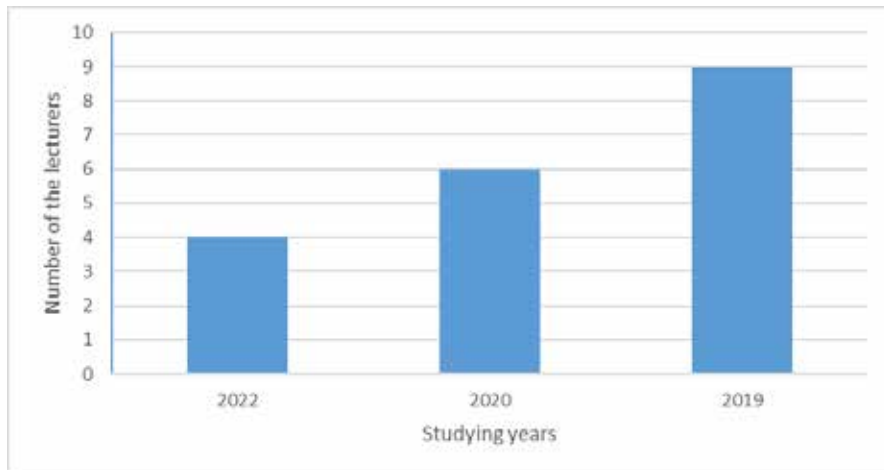


Fig. 1. Reducing of teaching staff

The reasons of teaching staff quitting were:

- the shortening of foreign student’s number (the law ‘no students – no teachers’);
- the growing requirements for scientific and pedagogical staff in Ukraine (every studying year – Scopus or Web of Science article, professional publications are at the expense of the lecturer; organising foreign language university contests; curator work; grant activity; methodical work (development and providing new courses and disciplines); vocational guidance work, study load more than 600 academic hours per year, etc.;
- poor management of the departments (unreliable system of student’s group formation (not suitable schedule, the number of students in one group for foreign language studying can be 1 foreign student or 28 Ukrainian students and during the war time even 115 Ukrainian students in Master’s degree course);
- no technical support of teaching staff (online studying is based on the lecturer’s personal computers, Laptops, Internet, etc.);
- unlimited working hours, mobbing, no rights but only obligations, no university’s authority protection from the fake scientific journals, etc.);
- in 2022 – the cynical attitude of the management of the faculty and department towards the staff (instead of uniting in the war time).

The first months of the war (from February to May) the half of teaching staff was forced to move to the safer regions of Ukraine, because Sumy is 40 km from Russian border (mostly, in the western part of Ukraine: Lvivska region, Zakarpatska region, Rivnenska region, but also

the Central part of Ukraine: Cherkaska region, Poltavaska region). There were mostly the women-lecturers with their children.

During the summer months the most part of the staff has returned to Sumy. Nowadays from the 23 lecturers only two of them are in Great Britain (Oxford and Scotland) (Fig. 2).

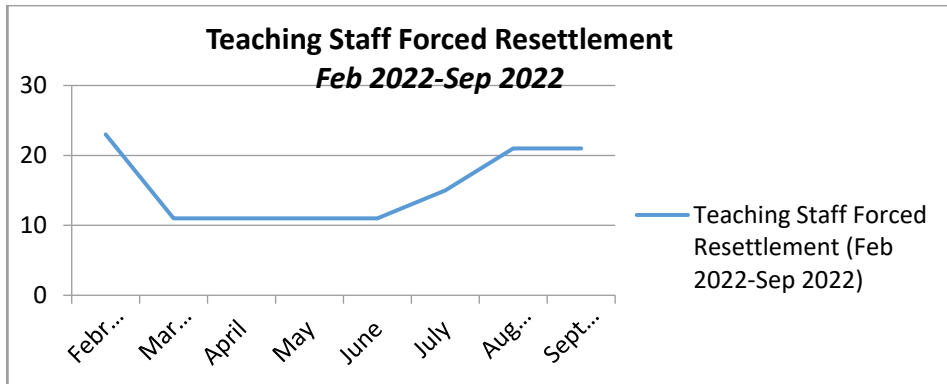


Fig. 2. Forced resettlement of SNAU Foreign Languages Department teaching staff

4. Studying process in Ukraine in war time

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine introduced changes in the system of professional pre-higher and higher education long before the start of the war. These changes were significantly supplemented during the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The table 1 below shows the main principles of non-stop work of institutions of higher and professional pre-higher education, which do not contradict the general European rules.

There are some peculiarities of the process organization: from the period of the 24th of February till nowadays foreign students are living in the countries of Europe (Hungary, France, the Great Britain, etc.), and also in India, China, Africa that causes the problem of internet connection and differences in time zones. The most responsible part of students is the Chinese one: at least 80–90% of them are usually at distant work (Zoom meeting, no Google Meet because of limited Google services in China). On the contrary, African students almost fully ignore the distant studying, prefer to send the home tasks through Viber and sometimes e-mails. Ukrainian students don't often have an opportunity to study (blackouts, poor internet connection, air alarms, etc.).

Sumy State University lecturers agreed to conduct the classes after working hours. It means they allowed students to join online meetings in the evenings (not blackout time). Of course, this initiative was not approved by university managers. Nevertheless, lecturers worked and still are working devotedly in their free time for the good of student's education.

In addition, Ukrainian lecturers used to apply their own mobile and computer devices for working and even total blackout didn't stop them from teaching. Lecturers attracted autonomous devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) and batteries to the studying process (different types of generators). Thanks to separate batteries the computers had been working for two-three hours. With the help of the hot spot on mobile phones the classes were held.

Table 1

Pprofessional pre-higher and higher education

<i>2020–2021</i>	<i>2022</i>	<i>2023</i>
The development of the institutional environment of higher, professional pre-higher education, national qualification system		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – KPI of heads of higher education institutions was introduced; – license terms of educational activities have been updated; – refusal of state diplomas; – the application of the Formula for the distribution of budget expenditures among institutions of higher education has been expanded; – the law of Ukraine on "Professional higher education" has been implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the strategy for the development of higher education in Ukraine for 2022–2032 and the operational plan for its implementation in 2022–2024 were approved; – the mechanism of the safe introductory campaign (national multi-subject test (NMST)) has been simplified; – determination of learning outcomes obtained in non-formal and informal education; – conditions for access to higher education have been created for residents of temporarily occupied and particularly dangerous territories; – conditions have been created for the preferential categories of graduates and those obtaining higher education; – denunciation of international obligations regarding cooperation with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – creation of conditions for expanding autonomy, corporatization and privatization of higher education institutions; – development of military education, training of specialists in the protection of critical infrastructure, preparation of youth for national resistance; – consolidation of the fields of training of higher education seekers to determine the profiling of higher education institutions;
Practical assistance in the management of institutions of higher and professional pre-higher education		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a single electronic system for monitoring the employment of graduates has been introduced; – Piloting of the Unified State Qualification Exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – relocation of institutions of higher and professional pre-higher education from temporarily occupied and particularly dangerous territories; – an introductory campaign was conducted in the new format of testing abroad; – training of the management staff of institutions of higher and professional pre-higher education in the peculiarities of work in the conditions of martial law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – transfer of higher and professional pre-higher education recipients of preferential categories to budget funding; – restyling of the management system of a consolidated institution of higher education (Professional pre-higher and higher education)

Besides, the number of students in the groups decreased significantly, the redundancy level among the university lecturers is very high.

The usual lessons are sometimes interrupted by the air alarm.

Thus, there were some reasons for the foreigners to continue education in Ukraine:

- not all regions are under attack, relatively safe;
- the studying is online;
- advance payment and close Bachelor's or Master's Degrees.

Online studying in Ukraine still allows the foreigners to master their grammar and vocabulary skills:

- the students from China, who are studying food technologies at our university got knowledge about the phonetic system of language, trained some specific sounds; they also learn some necessary phrases of business etiquette; try to model communicative situations, etc.;
- students of the Veterinary Faculty continued to study Business Ukrainian: different types of business letters, application forms and business calls; learned some necessary business phrases about different activities;
- the foreign students of the second course improved their vocabulary on topics “Ukrainian Traditions”, “Natural Recourses of Ukraine”, “Studying at university”, etc.

Thus, the process of studying continues, but the lecturers and the students face with three main problems:

- unstable internet connection;
- different time zones (Ukraine-Africa-China-European countries);
- often turning off the light (so called “blackouts”);
- psychological pressure of war.

This studying year in Sumy National Agrarian University (from the 1st of September, 2022 to the 31st of August, 2023) is characterized by the absent of foreign students of Preparatory Faculty. Before the war that Faculty accounted from four to six groups (approximately 60–80 students) of foreigners who gained the knowledge of Ukrainian language and English language to continue their further studying at universities of Ukraine (Sumy, Kharkiv, Kyiv, etc.).

However, the number of Master's degree students and PhD students has significantly increased. It is explained by the mobilization during the martial law for the young men from the age of 21 to 65. The law of Ukraine allows not to be mobilized if you have medical permission not to serve in the army or if you are the student of day time studying at university. For now, the number of this group of students fully compensates the quantity of Ukrainian students, but doesn't change the situation with the foreigners.

As of today, December 2022, a mixed form of education has been introduced in the universities of Ukraine. In those territories, where the security situation allows, Ukrainian first-year students study in lecture rooms, observing all safety rules (bomb shelters during an air attack). But mixed form is not still allowed for the foreign students.

5. Conclusions

As a conclusion, there are some main points to underline:

1. The higher education hasn't been stopped;
2. The lack of student number was compensated by the PhD's and Master's students;
3. The teaching staff is sufficient to ensure the educational process in institutions of higher and pre-higher education;
4. The transition to a mixed form of education gives hope for the return of all students in the classrooms;
5. In accordance with the future strategy many universities will have to be privatised and financed by themselves (no state support will be available);

6. With a great help of European countries, the professional pre-higher and higher educational institutions will be faster integrated into the European system of education;

7. In the case of victory of Ukraine in the Russian-Ukrainian war the system of education of Ukraine will have to be reconstructed and refined due to the European standards.

According to the current situation in Ukraine, it is difficult to assess the quality of higher education and professional pre-higher education. Fortunately, the learning process has not been completely stopped thanks to modern learning tools (distance learning, e-learning, etc.). Ukrainians are fighting not only for their lives, land, freedom but also for the opportunities to be in the family of real European society.

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