

ENSURING ACCESS TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN TIMES OF WAR: THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY

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Received: 22/02/2025 **Accepted:** 04/06/2025

ABSTRACT

Education in modern society has an exceptionally important mission – to shape a responsible and self-sufficient individual equipped with critical thinking and a protective immunity against numerous social myths and threats. The fundamental task of education is to prepare future specialists for life in rapidly changing conditions. This article is dedicated to analysing access to the educational process during wartime by addressing the following objectives: identifying current challenges and the foundations of the influence of globalization processes and domestic factors on Ukrainian education; exploring the impact of information technologies on the development of education; and outlining the main directions for modernizing national education. A systemic-structural approach was employed as a general scientific method which made it possible to identify problematic issues in ensuring access to the educational process during wartime, to analyze the development of Ukrainian education in the context of integrative educational processes, and to formulate proposals aimed at improving the modern national education model. The results of the analysis have led to conclusions regarding the necessity of uniting the efforts and resources of various countries to establish a unified educational system, universal quality assurance standards, and integrative and internationalization processes in education. Several key issues have been highlighted: training and/or retraining of academic staff through academic mobility, collaboration within educational and research grants, professional development programs, and internships. This will ensure high-quality education and the adoption of new teaching methods and formats; development and further improvement of technical infrastructure to support educational processes effectively.

Keywords: Threats, distance learning, reformatting, globalization, digitalization, information and communication technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in the formation and development of social relations. As a powerful means of introducing changes in society, it either becomes a driving force for the development of society or, on the contrary, slows it down. Education as a social institution has the power to harmonize modern society which suffers from permanent violence, alienation, and intolerance. The reasons for such phenomena should be sought in the dimension of how individuals perceive the world around them as well as in their understanding or lack of understanding of the events occurring around them.

The development of information technologies and the globalization of societal processes worldwide necessitate a thorough reformatting of the educational process. It is evident that the transformation of the educational environment in the process of informatization should primarily focus on improving the quality of education, creating new opportunities for learners whose educational demands are being reshaped under the influence of the global information environment.

Under martial law, there was a need to find new and change current methods, forms, and tools for distance learning for Ukrainian students. This paper explores the specific aspects of online education during the war in Ukraine.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

The relevance of this research is determined by the theoretical and practical significance of the issue as well as by the need for scientific understanding of the national vector of education which is evolving in light of global challenges, world achievements, and values.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, various theories of distance learning have been proposed by scholars. For example, Charles A. Wedemeyer, the developer of the theory known as open and distance education, explores the opportunities for obtaining education regardless of social status, health conditions, or geographical distance from educational centers. According to Wedemeyer, “independent learning” should meet the individual needs of students, focus on achieving personal goals, and not be tied to a specific educational institution. He believed that the key to success in distance learning lies in developing a strong connection between the student and the teacher (Shtefan & Borzenko, 2015). Effective teacher-child interaction is deemed a primary mechanism by which educational experience contributes to the development of learners’ competencies (Tilbe & Xiaosong, 2024).

A proponent of the theory of autonomy and independence in distance education, German scholar R. Delling, argues that distance learning is conducted through a dialogue between teacher and student facilitated by a communication signal. At the same time, the author places primary emphasis on the autonomy and independence of the student’s learning (Delling, 1978). Delling minimizes the role of the teacher and the educational institution, emphasizing the student’s independence and self-direction. The task of the educational institution, according to Delling, is to assist the student only when requested. If the student can work autonomously, the institution’s sole contribution should be providing information, materials, or library access (Shunevych, 2012).

The author of the theory of the industrialization of learning, O. Peters, views distance learning as a product of the industrial era. The scholar proposed the use of economic and industrial theory to analyze the distance learning format (Peters, 1971).

American sociologist E. Toffler, the author of the concept of the information society, wrote that humanity, at the turn of the millennium, could experience social discomfort due to the unsynchronized transition of states to the third (post-industrial) phase in the development of civilization, a phenomenon he termed “future shock”. The accelerated pace of technological and social changes leaves people feeling disconnected. Most social problems, Toffler argued, are symptoms of future shock. In his discussion of the components of such shock, he popularized the term “information overload” (Toffler, 1970). The present-day shock stems from the mismatch between lived reality and its cognitive representation, driven by accelerated change, event pressure, and information overload. Human adaptation lags, necessitating that education systems adapt to both present and future realities.

B. Holmberg's theory includes the main methods of distance learning, which ensure: (1) mastery of cognitive knowledge and skills incorporating emotional and psychomotor components; (2) deep individual study of educational material; (3) freedom of choice aimed at students who cannot or do not wish to engage in traditional, face-to-face learning systems; (4) openness to other forms of learning; (5) use of technological devices, division of labor, and electronic data processing which include elements of industrialization; (6) alignment with the development of the individual student (Holmberg, 1995).

In 1988, H. Perraton described distance learning as an educational process in which teaching is conducted by an instructor who is spatially or temporally distant from the students. (Perraton et al., 1988). H. Perraton emphasized: 1) the effectiveness of multimedia programs, 2) the necessity of feedback and a systematic approach to learning as mandatory components of distance education, 3) the focus on individualized learning, and 4) the effective preparation of educational materials (Shunevych, 2015).

The effectiveness of distance learning is considered controversial by M. Niari, E. Manousou, and A. Lionarakis. The researchers proposed applying the Pygmalion effect meaning that high expectations from students would lead to an increase in their learning productivity. Positive expectations from educators, their encouragement, have a beneficial impact on students' attitudes toward learning and enhance their self-motivation (Niari et al., 2016). Promoting students' interest in learning, valuing education, and boosting their confidence in their abilities and qualities are manifestations of intrinsic motivation and the internalization of values and regulatory processes (Deci et al., 1991).

The aim of this article is to analyze the challenges of access to the educational process during wartime. The goal can be achieved by addressing the following tasks: to identify the current challenges and the principles of globalization processes and internal factors affecting Ukrainian education; to explore the impact of information technologies on the development of education during wartime; to outline the main directions for modernizing national education; and to formulate proposals aimed at improving the current national education model.

METHODS

A systemic-structural approach was used as a general scientific method which allowed us to identify problematic issues related to ensuring access to the educational process during wartime, the development of education in Ukraine in the context of integration of educational processes, and to formulate proposals aimed at improving the current national education model. The application of this general scientific method led to the investigation of internal cause-and-effect, structural-functional, direct, and feedback relationships which made it possible to reveal the drawbacks and advantages of distance education.

The use of the dialectical method allowed for the analysis of current challenges and the principles of the influence of globalization processes and domestic factors on Ukrainian education providing an objective understanding of the formation of a new, high-quality education that meets the needs of individuals in the modern world. The synergetic method applied in studying allowed for the exploration of the impact of information technologies on the development of education in wartime conditions. The prognostic method was used to outline the main directions for the modernization of national education.

A comprehensive analysis of theoretical and practical issues in the development of education in a globalized society has enabled the formulation of the following research hypotheses:

- H1: Education serves as a means of implementing changes in society, both positive and negative.
- H2: Distance learning in the context of globalization serves as an effective tool for ensuring access to education.
- H3: War alters the format of the educational process leading to inequality in access to education due to a lack of technical resources and opportunities.
- H4: Learning under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and war has rapidly adapted learners to the distance learning format.
- H5: The transition to flexible curricula and innovative methods promotes the continuity of education and ensures the maintenance of the educational process under critical conditions.

FINDINGS

Obstacles to the Educational Process

Pedagogical processes are characterized by ambiguity and uniqueness. Their outcomes depend on the simultaneous influence of many factors. Changing even one factor can significantly alter the results of the process (Petruk et al., 2022). In the context of globalization, the formation of an information society, the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, and the challenges of war, distance learning has become an integral and necessary component of education. The widespread adoption of communication technologies has greatly accelerated educational transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic's onset in early 2020 triggered profound shifts in education, establishing digital transformation as a defining feature (Tuan & Lan, 2025). Shifting to online platforms is now an essential element for education (Nyme et al., 2022).

As a result of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine approximately 800,000 schoolchildren switched from traditional to distance learning (from 17,669 students in 2021 to 772,909 in 2022) and to homeschooling (from 4,695 to 64,409 students, respectively). These changes mostly affected the East and South of the country where around 40% and 30% of students, respectively, were forced to relocate abroad or to other regions of the country. Due to the ongoing security threat to participants in the educational process, in the first half of the 2022/23 academic year full-time education could not be resumed. Only 15% of educational institutions operated in-person, 33% remotely, and 51% used a blended approach combining in-person and distance learning. In the East and South of Ukraine distance learning predominated while in the Central and Northern regions blended learning was more common, and in the West cities used blended learning while villages had in-person classes (<https://osvita.ua/school/88943/>). The results of a 2023/2024 survey among education institution heads in Eastern and Northern Ukraine reveal that distance learning is the primary mode of education (78% and 86% respectively). (https://sqe.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Zvit_Osvita_pid_chas_viyni_2023_SQE-22.05.2024.pdf).

Distance education refers to an individualized educational process, primarily conducted via mediated interaction among geographically dispersed educational participants within a specialized environment, leveraging contemporary psycho-pedagogical and information-communication technologies (<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1060-12#Text>).

The impact of war on education generates a range of humanitarian and social problems: educational institutions of all levels are subject to bombings, shelling, and arson. Such actions inflict damage, depriving a large number of students of their right to education, thereby destroying the foundation upon which communities build their future. In many countries armed conflicts continue to destroy not only educational infrastructure but also the hopes and aspirations of entire generations – as emphasized in the Safe Schools Declaration, a political commitment to protect education during armed conflicts which has been endorsed by 114 countries (Safe Schools Declaration, 2015). Ensuring the best possible start in life for children is becoming an increasing priority in all countries (Raikes, A., Rao, N., Yoshikawa, H. et al., 2023).

The current century has been marked by the rapid spread of digitalization which has impacted all areas of public life. In the context of current restrictions on personal communication in the real world (due to the danger of being in areas affected by military actions) the distance form of communication has proven to be safer and more suitable for the circumstances, particularly in the educational process. The main factors hindering the educational process under martial law are: air alerts, power outages, lack of or weak internet connectivity, shortage of bomb shelters and safe havens.

Over the past academic year, the psychological well-being of learners has deteriorated. At the same time, the number of people who feel safe, calm, energetic, and happy has decreased by 20% in each category. It is extremely important to equip young people with the necessary life skills for social and emotional development (Tomaszek & Muchacka-Cymerman, 2024).

Thus, there has arisen a societal need to establish new high-quality education. Only fair competition between institutions will contribute to the growth of education quality (Kyrychenko & Ridel, 2020). Educational priorities should be aligned with preserving the existing material and spiritual values while determining the future direction of education within the context of advancing global civilization. This approach highlights the need for an adaptive education system that can both preserve traditions and embrace new opportunities

for growth and development (Ridei et al., 2022). Education as a social institution requires new approaches to learning, the use of advanced pedagogical experiences, and the application of non-traditional forms, methods, and tools for teaching and upbringing (Zapara et al., 2021).

Key challenges of the educational process in times of war, according to teachers, include unstable learning conditions, limited ways of organizing cognitive activities, decreased motivation, and the unstable psycho-emotional state of both students and teachers (<https://osvita.ua/school/88943/>). Among the factors that students lack the most in online education during the war, they highlight the absence of practical sessions (Sheykina et al., 2024).

Given the current situation, distance education has become popular (and, under martial law, mandatory) requiring the provision of necessary electronic tools and resources. These include electronic textbooks and instructional literature and access to e-libraries and educational institution websites, online platforms hosting educational courses and building practical competencies.

The need for balanced actions in state policies regarding the execution of information and communication functions is determined by the informational threats facing modern society and education. These threats include: 1) violation of information confidentiality – refers to the acquisition of information by users or processes in violation of established access rules; 2) violation of information integrity – involves complete or partial destruction, distortion, modification, imposition of false information; 3) violation of information availability – involves loss (partial or complete) of system functionality blocking access to information; 4) loss of control over the information processing system characterized by violations of user and process identification and authenticity procedures, granting them permissions, monitoring their activities or refusal to receive or forward messages (Sosnin, 2017).

It should be noted that the field of mastering the latest information technologies and their implementation in the educational process has a number of problematic issues. Firstly, a significant number of teachers and administrators lack initiative and is unwilling to acquire new competencies which is explained by the formality and underfunding of teacher training programs. Secondly, there is weak financial support for universities from the government in terms of implementing digital technologies into the educational process. Thirdly, there is a disconnection between the theoretical learning process and the acquisition of practical skills. Solutions to these problems could include attracting grant funding, direct participation of potential employers in the educational process, and testing professional programs.

The multifaceted impact of the conflict accompanied by physical destruction and mass displacement creates formidable challenges. Ukrainian universities have a unique opportunity to respond to the demands of wartime tackling issues such as vulnerability caused by the conflict, national security needs, employment inequality, and health sector requirements (Stoliaryk et al., 2024).

Directions for the Modernization of Ukrainian Education

In the modern world, the role of higher education institutions extends far beyond the simple transmission of knowledge. This expanded role is often referred to as the “third mission” of universities. Such a strategy complements the traditional functions of universities and plays a key role in the development of education, science, and social progress as a whole fostering innovation (Stoliaryk et al., 2024). Given the aforementioned, three main directions for the modernization of Ukrainian higher education have been identified:

1. systematic improvement of the national educational space;
2. use of experiences gained from the previous higher education system;
3. application of an effective education system in higher educational institutions with efficient economics and management to meet the needs of modern post-industrial society and individual interests (Kucherenko, 2019).

On the global educational stage diversification is linked to the globalization of the world economy. The needs of a globalized world cannot be met by traditional educational institutions and methods of teaching that is why distance learning, computer technologies, and online learning formats have become widespread. New structures are emerging that specialize in providing educational services. Thus, “education without

borders” is taking shape, bringing new players and new educational institutions to the market such as virtual universities, licensing or franchising universities, corporate universities, offshore higher education zones, university consortia, companies, libraries, museums, organizations related to media activities, and education brokers (Halionkina, 2018). Under such conditions, the transformation of the educational environment into the informatization process should primarily aim at improving the quality of education and creating new opportunities for learners who are forming a new educational demand under the influence of the global information environment (Bondar & Strelnyk, 2022).

Distance education is reshaping the approach to teaching and learning. Changes in national education models are occurring rapidly and transformatively. As educational institutions around the world adapt to these changes a so-called dynamic education landscape is emerging which generates immense interest among researchers, educators, administrators, policymakers, and businesses. Instead of the “correspondence” courses which originated in England in the mid-nineteenth century and involved the long-distance mailing of paper documents, e-education promotes asynchronous as well as synchronous methods of delivering educational services along with access to online platforms for discussion, chats, and video conferencing (Shailendra et al., 2018).

Prospects for the use of digital technologies in education should be realized considering the interests of participants in the educational process as well as the state. The state should be concerned about the active development of digital educational technologies as they will provide broader access to education for various segments of the population, helping to overcome inequalities in education. Through the active use of information technologies flexibility in the learning process schedule can be ensured while reducing the influence of the instructor, thus increasing the time available for self-improvement. Given this, a priority task for participants in the educational process is not only mastering new digital technologies but also actively utilizing them in their work. An essential condition for effective online learning is the support of communication between the institution and the learner (Thomas, 2022).

The introduction of innovative teaching and learning methods is a requirement of the times and necessitates the acquisition of analytical skills. To prevent scholasticism in modern domestic education networked educational technologies and elements of adult education methodology should be utilized. These include setting educational goals, working in small groups using case studies, and discussing practical aspects of applying acquired knowledge during the learning process (Halionkina, 2018).

The use of information technologies within an innovative educational environment offers certain advantages and opportunities for both educators and learners as well as for the entire educational institution. These include: 1) improvement in the quality of the educational; 2) effective information search; 3) adaptability across educational and professional levels; 4) quality development of educational materials; 5) conducting research enabling efficient data collection, collaboration and dissemination of results. (Khovanskaya et al., 2019). Improving the skills of demonstrating a positive attitude and enthusiasm online will contribute to the formation of positive relationship between teachers and students allowing for better emotional engagement of learners in the educational process (Thomas, 2022). In this context, it is important to encourage and support the daily work and professional development of teachers related to the effective use of technology for lesson planning which achieves both genuine and meaningful student learning as well as an understanding of the subject and their computer literacy (Appovaa, 2022).

According to the Concept for the Development of Distance Education in Ukraine the characteristic positive features of distance education should include flexibility, modularity, parallelism, large audience capacity, cost-effectiveness, technological advancement, social equality, internationalism, the new role of the instructor, positive impact on students (learners, listeners), and quality (<http://www.osvita.org.ua/distance/pravo/00.html>).

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

In the process of fighting for the independence of our state through armed conflict the use of distance learning has significant advantages:

- flexibility of the educational process which involves choosing the time and place of study. Furthermore, students develop a sense of self-discipline and a commitment to self-education. The need for autonomy relates to the feeling of psychological freedom and the desire to be oneself, the need for competence refers to a sense of being able to succeed, and relatedness signifies experiencing a close connection with others (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021);
- cost-effectiveness, as there is no need to spend money on accommodation, transportation, etc.;
- formation of an individual educational trajectory through the use of information and communication technologies;
- ensuring the principle of lifelong learning, opening new opportunities both for acquiring education and for mastering individual courses;
- mitigating the spread of the pandemic, fostering a more secure environment. (Figure 1)

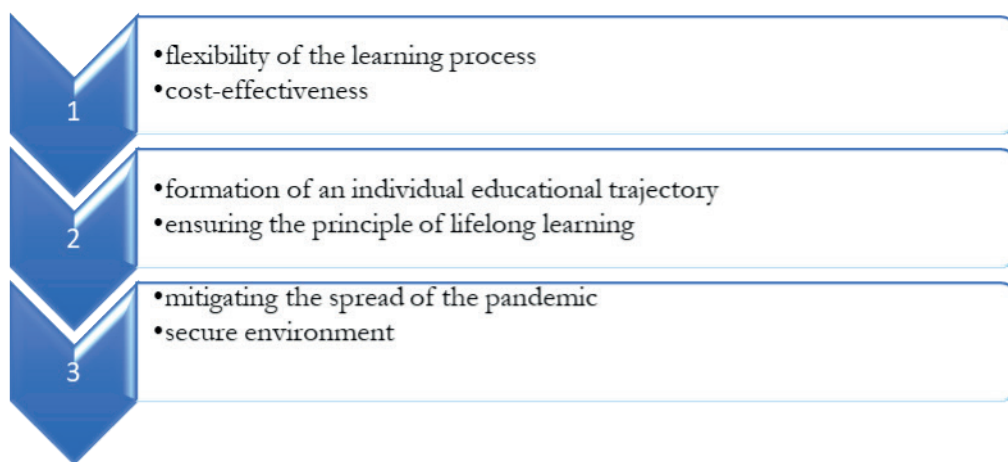


Figure 1. Blocks highlighting the advantages of distance education

At first glance the connection between education and military conflicts caused by social tensions may not be obvious as traditionally the education sector performs functions related to the development of human intellectual potential. In times of social unrest caused by war education is typically viewed as secondary since the primary focus is on the safety of society's members. Thus, the State Service for Education Quality of Ukraine conducted a survey in December 2024 regarding the basic aspects of the educational process organization (quality, safety, and resources) in institutions of professional pre-higher and higher education under martial law. Respondents noted that the current level of educational process organization in the first semester of the 2024/2025 academic year meets or even exceeds their expectations. 39% of students and 36% of teachers rated the level of educational process organization with the highest score. Thus, a significant portion of respondents highly appreciates the efforts of educational institutions to ensure proper quality of the educational process under the current conditions (<https://sqe.gov.ua/fpo-zvo-2024/>).

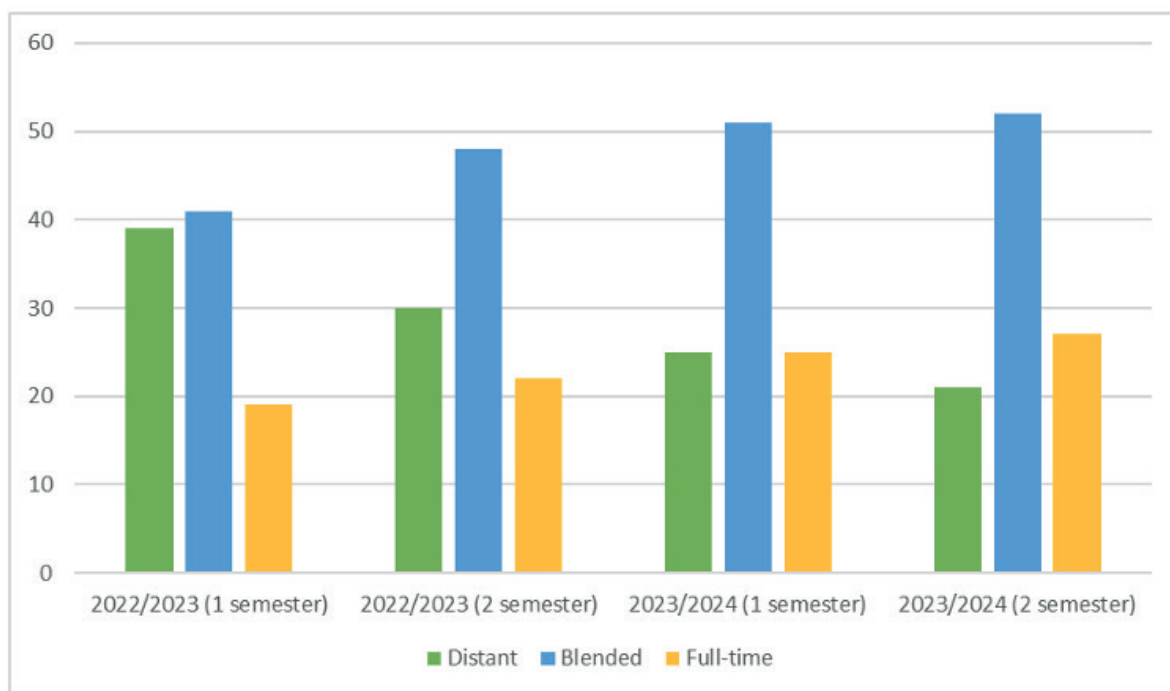


Figure 2. Implementation of educational process organization formats by professional pre-higher and higher education institutions during martial law (general dynamics)

Similarly, full-time students demonstrate the highest level of satisfaction (89% in institutions of professional pre-higher education and higher education). The satisfaction level with the blended format among students is also high (88%). The distance learning format received the lowest satisfaction scores among students of professional pre-higher education (85%), but remains consistently high among students of higher education institutions (89%) (Figure 2) (<https://sqe.gov.ua/fpo-zvo-2024/>).

Undoubtedly, distance education has its drawbacks that can be grouped into the following three blocks:

1. psychological block: lack of effective communication, loss of motivation for learning, isolation, inability to receive adequate feedback from students and instructors especially regarding unclear tasks, and the absence of independent learning skills in some students. During the war participants in the educational process, particularly learners, experience constant stress which reduces their motivation and ability to learn. Educators face emotional burnout due to working under conditions of instability and the need for constant adaptation to change;
2. technical block: insufficient development of information and communication technologies and material and technical support of educational institutions, difficulties with technical provision and access to the Internet, and issues with student identification. Distance learning has become the primary form of education during the war. However, unequal access to technology, the internet and electricity has created additional challenges, particularly for low-income families. At the same time, the use of online platforms promotes flexibility and enables the participation of learners who have been forced to relocate;
3. organizational block: high time expenditure on preparing distance courses by academic staff; adherence to academic integrity standards during the completion of various tasks. (Figure 3)

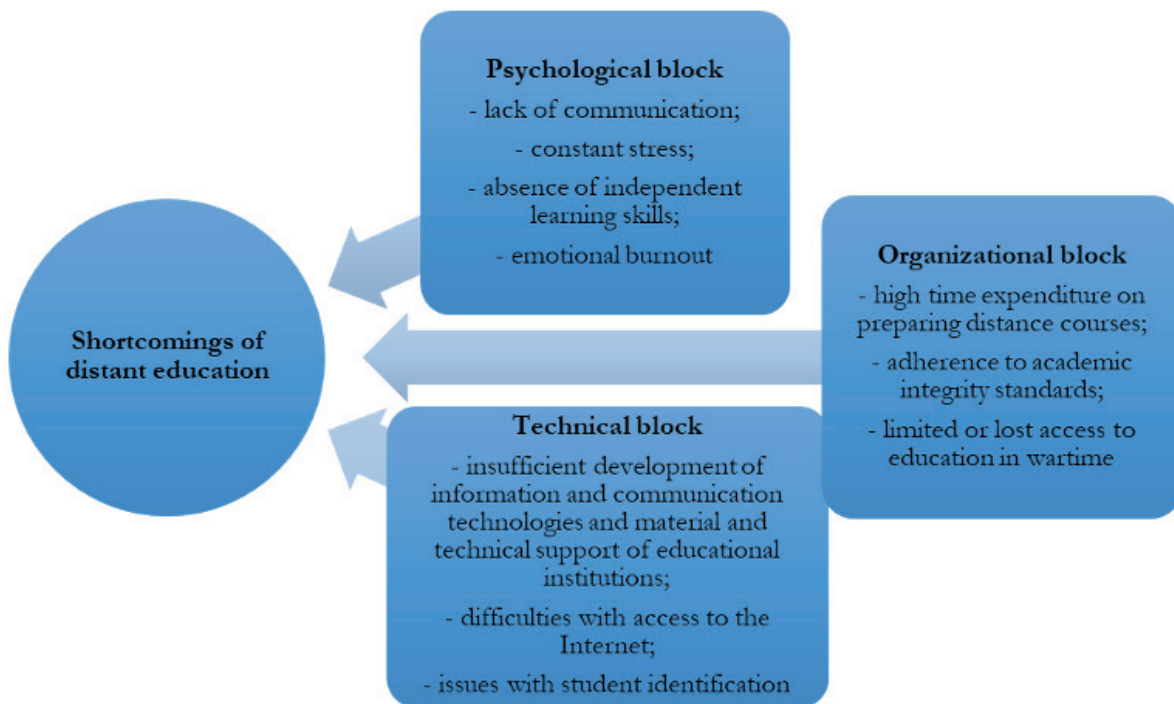


Figure 3. Psychological, organizational, and technical blocks highlighting the shortcomings of distance learning

The war has significantly deepened inequality in access to education. Thus, learners in frontline and temporarily occupied areas face limited or entirely lost access to educational materials due to damaged infrastructure, lack of internet connectivity and power outages. Meanwhile, students from evacuated regions encounter challenges such as insufficient school placements or adjustments to new educational requirements. (Figure 4)

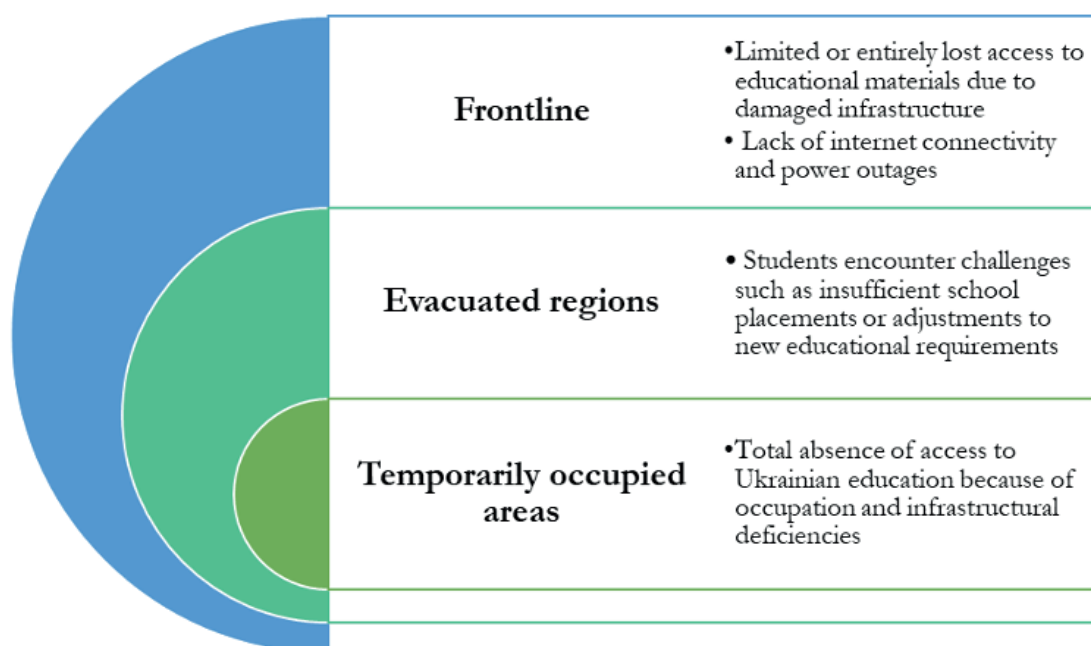


Figure 4. The impact of war on access to education in Ukraine

Thus, in the context of informatization education ceases to be a process of knowledge transmission from teacher to student or from lecturer to student but becomes a means of mutual information exchange supporting an individual's lifelong aspirations. The fundamental task of education is to prepare future specialists for life in rapidly changing conditions including real danger. It is an indisputable fact that with the transition from an industrial to an information society and the formation of a global educational space the tasks of academic education are changing which requires the application of information and communication technologies but with consideration of national education traditions combined with the modern achievements of foreign educational systems.

To address the outlined challenges, particularly during wartime, the following measures are necessary:

- Support for psychological health: Implement programs including state-funded initiatives to provide psychological assistance to participants in the educational process.
- Fostering partnerships: Collaborate with international organizations, educational institutions and other entities to secure financial, technical and educational resources.
- Investing in infrastructure: Allocate resources to restore educational infrastructure and provide necessary technical equipment.
- Developing resilient education models: Create sustainable education systems capable of functioning effectively during crises.

Globalization processes significantly accelerate societal changes, promote the diversification of governance at the global, regional and national levels, and increase the social responsibility of the state in its relations with civil society, influencing education. In this context, the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) must be directed towards improving the quality of human life with the goal of personal development.

The twenty-first century is characterized by a focus on finding a universal model of education that harmoniously combines knowledge, practice, traditions, innovations, national peculiarities and global trends. The development of information technologies and the globalization of societal processes around the world require a thorough reformatting of the educational process.

The globalization of the educational environment requires the consolidation of efforts and resources from different countries to form a unified educational system, common standards for ensuring the quality of education and the integration and internationalization processes in education. The participation of states in global politics, economics and culture demands active support and development of human potential as the most important and effective factor for the development of the civilized world. We contribute to the development of an intricate, interconnected well-being network, woven together by systems, relationships, mental health, and ethical principles, fostering resilience among educational stakeholders (Cheung, 2024).

Education in modern society has an extremely important mission – to shape a responsible and self-sufficient individual who possesses critical thinking skills, as well as a protective immunity against numerous social myths and threats. Today, the level of personal intellectual development is measured not so much by the amount of knowledge acquired but by the level of constructiveness in behavioral strategies which are manifested in various conflict situations.

The open market of educational services in Ukraine and globalization processes generate competition among educational institutions for applicants. This creates objective conditions for the improvement of educational programs, teaching methods and management decisions (Figure 5). It also emphasizes the importance of institutional autonomy, collaboration with stakeholders and the establishment of professional associations. Institutions of higher learning are highly competitive in their efforts to enroll new students (Pozdnyakova, 2022).

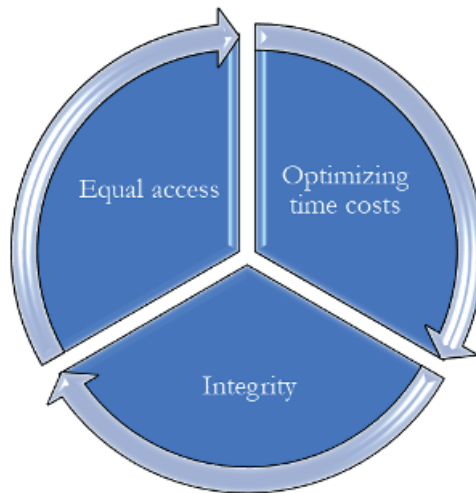


Figure 5. Key challenges for improving distance education during wartime include optimizing time costs for preparing distance courses, ensuring adherence to academic integrity, and creating equal access to education

The experience of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed Ukraine to adapt more quickly to distance learning during martial law which proves the hypothesis advanced. Distance education cannot replace in-person or face-to-face learning. However, it still carries risks of diminishing educational quality and success as well as deepening existing educational inequalities. In this context, several issues have been identified that need to be addressed: (1) the development of new courses that can compete with similar ones from other countries; (2) the training and/or retraining of academic and teaching staff through academic mobility, collaboration in educational and research grants, participation in professional development courses and internships which will ensure the quality of education and mastery of new teaching methods and forms taking into account the constant development of information and communication technologies; and (3) the development and further improvement of technical infrastructure.

In a martial law context, distance education must prioritize safety. It should comply with a secure educational environment, including data protection, cybersecurity, anti-bullying measures, and freedom from propaganda. Extra care must be taken to address teachers potentially involved in collaboration, like supporting aggression or promoting aggressor education standards.

The findings of the article confirm that war significantly affects access to education. However, further efforts should focus on addressing inequalities, facilitating the psychological adaptation of participants in the educational process, and overcoming technical barriers to ensure quality and accessible education even in times of crisis. We are convinced that universities, institutes and educational institutions can make a greater contribution to the development of peace than the most powerful army in the world.

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