

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ / REVIEWS

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EDUCATION UNDER WAR CONDITIONS: A NEW STUDY OF UKRAINIAN SCHOLARS

Review of the monograph: Ukrainian Education in the Flames of War / N. Nychkalo,

O. Ovcharuk, V. Hordiyenko, I. Ivaniuk; ed. N. Nychkalo. Kyiv :

LLC “Yurka Liubchenka”, 2024. 208 p.

ОСВІТА В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ: НОВА СТУДІЯ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ УЧЕНИХ

Рецензія на монографію: Українська освіта у полум'ї війни / Н. Ничкало,

О. Овчарук, В. Гордієнко, І. Іванюк; за ред. Н. Ничкало. Київ :

ТОВ “Юрка Любченка”, 2024. 208 с.

The humanitarian sphere of Ukraine, including education, suffered massive losses during the years of the modern Russo-Ukrainian war, which began in February 2014 (Ilnytskyi, Starka, & Haliv, 2022; Haliv, & Sviontyk, 2023; Haliv, & Ilnytskyi, 2023). The education

system suffered both direct and indirect losses. The former include the destruction of educational institutions, the death of teachers and pupils, lecturers and students, and the use of Ukrainian schools in the occupied territories by the Russians to implement their own educational programmes. Indirect losses usually include difficulties that interfere with the organization of a traditional educational process: air strikes, internal relocation of the educational process participants within Ukraine and their departure abroad, deterioration of educational institutions material support, etc. It is precisely these aspects of the education system functioning in Ukraine that are the subject of the monograph written by the Ukrainian scholars Nelia Nychkalo, Oksana Ovcharuk, Valentyna Hordiyenko, and Iryna Ivaniuk, which was published in 2024.

The monograph consists of nine chapters. In Chapter I, the authors outlined the tragedy of the Ukrainian people, pointing at the deaths and injuries of children. They used publicly available statistics posted on the “Children of War” platform. According to it, as of March 2024, according to official information from the Prosecutor General’s Office of Ukraine, 531 children died and more than 1,231 were wounded and injured of varying severity. The most affected children lived in the following regions: Donetsk – 520, Kharkiv – 332, Kherson – 148, Kyiv – 130, Dnipropetrovsk – 111, Mykolayiv – 101, Zaporizhzhia – 100, Chernihiv – 72, Luhansk – 67 (p. 15). The UNICEF data were cited, according to which at least half of children aged 13–15 experienced psychological consequences of the war in Ukraine, had problems with sleeping, and every fifth one suffered from intrusive thoughts and memories, which are typical symptoms of a post-traumatic stress disorder. 40% of children across Ukraine experience difficulties accessing education due to lack of appropriate conditions, and in frontline areas, half of school-age children have no access to education at all. Children lost two years of Reading lessons and a year of Mathematics (p. 16).

Chapter 2, “Large-scale Destruction of Ukraine – Undeniable Signs of Genocide,” focuses on characterizing the scale of educational institutions destruction. The authors conclude that education is also one of the most affected areas. The education sector, as of early September 2023, suffered losses of 10.1 billion US dollars. The total number of damaged and destroyed educational facilities exceeds 3.5 thousand, including 1.7 thousand secondary education institutions, more than 1 thousand preschool institutions, and 586 higher education institutions. The greatest losses from destruction and damage to educational institutions are in Kharkiv, Donetsk, Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia and Kyiv regions (p. 22). It should be noted that the title of this chapter is incorrect, because material and financial losses in the war are not evidence or sign of genocide. Genocide is indicated by Russia’s goals in this war, as well as the murders of the Ukrainian population by the Russian troops, the abduction of Ukrainian children, and forced assimilation of the Ukrainians.

Chapter 3 of the monograph deals with the abduction of Ukrainian children, actually organized by the Russian occupation authorities. The authors, relying on reports from the media, the Ukrainian authorities, and analytical data from public organizations, provided known information about the deportation of Ukrainian children and the existence of filtration units where parents are separated from their children. Therefore, in the chapter there are provided several examples of the tragic fate of Ukrainian children who were abducted by the Russians, and some children who were adopted by the Russian families without their will (or the consent of their parents/guardians). It should be noted that the issue of abduction of Ukrainian children was investigated on the basis of open sources by M. Haliv, V. Ilnytskyi, O. Karpenko (Haliv, Ilnytskyi, & Karpenko, 2024; Haliv, & Karpenko, 2024).

In Chapter 4, the authors analyze the threats to the education system under martial law. First of all, the scholars point out three options for the educational process in Ukraine: online, offline, and blended. Forms of education in educational institutions are determined by regional military administrations, taking into account the current state of emergency. According to the information of the regional military administrations (except for Donetsk, Luhansk and Kherson regions), as of August 15, 2023, 19,170 objects (buildings) of educational institutions were ready for the educational process in the full-time form of training according to the indicators of providing participants in the educational process with protective structures of civil defense, which amounted to 67.97% of the total number of such objects and made it possible to provide shelter for 4,687,413 participants in the educational process (56.7%) (p. 34). Therefore, the authors emphasize the need to solve the problem of lack of shelter in educational institutions, while pointing at the Concept of Security of Educational Institutions, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on April 7, 2023, as well as several orders of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine. They cite the examples of appearance of the first underground schools, in particular in Kharkiv subway.

The authors of the monograph called air alerts a significant problem for full-fledged education. They relied on surveys of pupils, their parents, teachers, and heads of educational institutions conducted in 2023. This is not only about air alerts, but also about internal anxiety – among the dominant emotions among pupils. At the same time, parents and teachers assessed the emotional state of children better than pupils. At least three times more children have an anxious state than their parents and teachers believe. The study showed that a quarter of schoolchildren had pessimistic views about the future of Ukraine, another 25% were neither optimistic nor pessimistic. And every fourth pupil wanted to go abroad after finishing school (p. 35).

In the monograph it is stated that as a result of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine, about 800,000 schoolchildren changed their form of education from face-to-face to distance learning (from 17,669 students in 2021 to 772,909 in 2022) and family (home) (from 4,695 to 64,409 students, respectively). These changes affected the east and south of Ukraine the most, from where about 30–40% of pupils were forced to leave for abroad or other regions of the country (p. 42, 45). When characterizing educational losses, the authors mainly cited the results of research by the State Service for the Quality of Education or a number of public organizations, according to which educational losses consisted of worsening learning outcomes for students in primary, basic, and secondary schools, especially in Mathematics, Physics, Ukrainian Literature, and History of Ukraine. At the same time, the authors mention a number of projects aimed at overcoming educational losses. However, the main emphasis in these projects is on preparing teachers for such challenges.

Another challenge for the Ukrainian children is going studying to two schools simultaneously – Ukrainian and foreign. The largest number of Ukrainian schoolchildren is registered in Poland – about half a million, in Germany – over 300 thousand, in the Czech Republic – over 70 thousand, Romania, Spain, Italy and Slovakia accepted 30–40 thousand pupils. In other European countries, the number of Ukrainian children ranges from several hundred to 10,000 (p. 50). The authors named certain steps and measures taken by the governments of European countries to provide Ukrainian children with the opportunity to study in their schools.

Other challenges and problems (exhaustion of pupils and teachers; assessment of academic achievements; the ability of Ukrainian teachers abroad to work online in Ukrainian schools;

the “New Ukrainian School” reform, which is not fully implemented under war conditions; the complexity of organizing external independent evaluation) that faced Ukrainian education under war conditions were only named by the authors, but were not analyzed in detail. Chief focus was on the development of professional (vocational and technical) education in Ukraine, to the adoption of a number of important documents on improving the practical training of specialists in accordance with the requirements of the labour market.

The authors describe the work of several training centres operating both near the front line and in the western regions of Ukraine. In the monograph there is also outlined the damage to Ukrainian higher education institutions from the war. It is noted that 34 higher education institutions (institutes, universities and academies), 42 colleges (professional pre-higher education institutions) and 65 structural units have already been relocated or are in the process of being relocated in Ukraine. Chief focus is on the complex history of Taras Shevchenko National University of Luhansk, which was forced to evacuate in 2014 (pp. 65–68), as well as Kherson State University, which moved to Ivano-Frankivsk in 2022 (pp. 68–69).

The authors spoke about the work of those educational institutions located near the Russian and Belarusian borders, in particular in Sumy region. There were highlighted volunteer and charitable activities of pupils and teachers of schools in the western regions of Ukraine, who provided and continue to provide assistance to displaced children, their parents, and teachers. The difficult conditions in which the evacuation of schools from the eastern regions took place with the help of volunteers are elucidated.

In Chapter 5 there is highlighted the problem of education in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The authors elucidate the measures taken by the occupation administrations aimed at introducing the Russian educational programs, curricula, and educational content into schools, vocational colleges, and universities in the occupied territories. The purposeful policy of denationalization and Russification of Ukrainian youth, its transformation into a part of the Russian militarized society, is described. The practice of involving the Ukrainian children and youth in the Russian “Youth Army” is indicated, which is compared with the “Hitler Youth” organization in Nazi Germany. In our opinion, in this section the authors should have used the studies by O. Pashkova (Pashkova, 2021; Pashkova, 2023; Pashkova, 2025), S. Zubchenko (Zubchenko, 2016), B. Demianenko and A. Demianenko (Demianenko, & Demianenko, 2021), H. Oliinyk and H. Bækken, (Oliinyk, & Bækken, 2023).

The authors highlighted some principles of organizing the education of internally displaced children and adults in Chapter 6. In our opinion, it needs to be supplemented with statistical data. In Chapter 7, the authors returned to the issue of education of Ukrainian children abroad, primarily in the countries of the European Union. Chapter 8 is devoted to the activities of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences during the war. It should be noted that the authors are employees of this scientific institution, so the appearance of this chapter in their narrative is explained more by institutional patriotism than by the objectives of the monograph. However, it is important that the authors outline the results of a series of surveys of Ukrainian teachers conducted by scholars of the National Academy of Sciences on the impact of the war on the quality and effectiveness of the educational process. The last section is devoted to changes in the Ukrainian educational legislation in the context of a full-scale war.

In general, we positively evaluate the monograph “Ukrainian Education in the Flames of War”. However, we consider it necessary to express a number of comments. Firstly, the monograph contains repetitions, the authors’ references to a number of subjects in different sections. Secondly, the authors relied mainly on the Internet sources, but did not take into

account the rather solid historiography of the Russo-Ukrainian war in general and the historiography of educational processes in Ukraine under Russian aggression in particular. Thirdly, the authors repeatedly went beyond the stated chronological limits. Describing the state of education in Ukraine in the context of a full-scale war (since February 24, 2022), they have been often forced to resort to retrospective coverage of various aspects of the education system functioning since 2014. In our opinion, it was appropriate to begin the analysis of the impact of the war on the education sector of Ukraine precisely in 2014, systematically presenting not only the losses, threats and challenges for education, but also its transformation under war conditions. Fourthly, the authors did not pay enough attention to the characteristics of education as a component of Ukraine's national security, its new tasks under the conditions of a full-scale war. It would be appropriate to show attempts to reform the system of initial military training in institutions of general secondary education, professional pre-higher and vocational education. The authors did not mention the attempts of the authorities and public organizations to improve the military and patriotic education of the Ukrainian children and youth. However, we still consider this monograph to be a sufficiently successful attempt to cover and identify the main problems of the Ukrainian education system in wartime.

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