







The teaching approach for Ukrainian children affected by war: addressing challenges in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT. The article examines historical, pedagogical, and axiological aspects concerning the education of children impacted by the traumatic effects of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Based on an in-depth examination of scholarly literature, the anthropological aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have been explained, along with the existential traits of Ukrainians and the present conditions faced by children impacted by military operations. These insights lay the foundation for organizing the educational process within the country. The implementation of an online questionnaire survey methodology enabled the examination of common challenges experienced by Ukrainian teachers when working with students during times of conflict. The research findings have identified several prominent obstacles in the educational process, including challenges related to student-teacher communication resulting from psycho-emotional distress and depressive disorders. Moreover, unstable educational conditions caused by periodic air raids, ongoing hostilities, and intermittent power outages, as well as limited access to high-speed Internet and necessary ICT for learning, have been identified as significant hurdles. Further challenges revolve around adaptation, homesickness, and limited options for organizing educational and cognitive activities. Using an empirical data analysis approach, the authors conduct a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative assessment of the research findings. The assessment facilitates the identification of the most efficient methods and techniques used by Ukrainian teachers when working with children affected by war. The significance of flexibility and adaptability in educational planning has been highlighted, including the necessity to modify the dual mode of learning in educational institutions, implementing the combination of synchronous and asynchronous formats in pedagogical interactions, and individualizing teaching approaches.

Keywords: children of war, Ukrainian wartime education, educational process, distance teaching methods.

A abordagem de ensino para crianças ucranianas afetadas pela guerra: enfrentando os desafios do século XXI

RESUMO. O artigo examina aspectos históricos, pedagógicos e axiológicos relativos à educação de crianças afetadas pelas consequências traumáticas da invasão total da Ucrânia pela Rússia em fevereiro de 2022. Com base em uma análise abrangente da literatura científica, o artigo elucida as dimensões antropológicas da guerra russo-ucraniana, destaca as características existenciais dos ucranianos e delinea as circunstâncias atuais das crianças afetadas pelas operações militares. Essas percepções estabelecem a base para a organização do processo educacional no país. O método de uma pesquisa por questionário on-line possibilitou o estudo dos desafios típicos enfrentados pelos professores ucranianos ao trabalhar com alunos em tempos de guerra. Os resultados da pesquisa identificaram vários obstáculos proeminentes no processo educacional, incluindo desafios relacionados à comunicação aluno-professor resultantes de angústia psicoemocional e estados depressivos. Além disso, as condições educacionais instáveis causadas por ataques aéreos periódicos, hostilidades contínuas e interrupções intermitentes de energia, bem como o acesso limitado à Internet de alta velocidade e às TIC necessárias para o aprendizado, foram identificados como obstáculos significativos. Outros desafios dizem respeito à adaptação, à saudade de casa e às opções limitadas para organizar atividades educacionais e cognitivas, entre outros. Usando uma abordagem de análise de dados empíricos, o autor realiza uma avaliação quantitativa e qualitativa abrangente dos resultados da pesquisa. A avaliação permite a identificação dos métodos e técnicas mais eficazes usados pelos professores ucranianos ao trabalhar com crianças afetadas pela guerra. A importância da flexibilidade e da adaptabilidade no planejamento educacional é destacada, incluindo a necessidade de modificar o modo dual de aprendizagem nas instituições educacionais, aplicando a combinação de formatos síncronos e assíncronos nas interações pedagógicas e individualizando as abordagens de ensino.

Palavras-chave: crianças de guerra, educação ucraniana em tempos de guerra, processo educacional, métodos de ensino a distância.

Enfoque pedagógico de los niños ucranianos afectados por La guerra: una respuesta a los retos del siglo XXI

RESUMEN. El artículo examina aspectos históricos, pedagógicos y axiológicos relativos a la educación de los niños afectados por las traumáticas consecuencias de la invasión a gran escala de Ucrania por parte de Rusia en febrero de 2022. A partir de un análisis exhaustivo de la literatura científica, el artículo dilucida las dimensiones antropológicas de la guerra ruso-ucraniana, destaca las características existenciales de los ucranianos y delinea las circunstancias actuales de los niños afectados por las operaciones militares. Estas percepciones sientan las bases para organizar el proceso educativo en el país. El método de encuesta por cuestionario en línea permitió estudiar los retos típicos a los que se enfrentan los profesores ucranianos al trabajar con alumnos en tiempos de guerra. Los resultados de la investigación han identificado varios obstáculos destacados dentro del proceso educativo, incluidos los retos relacionados con la comunicación entre alumnos y profesores derivados de la angustia psicoemocional y los estados depresivos. Además, se han identificado como obstáculos importantes las condiciones educativas inestables causadas por los ataques aéreos periódicos, las hostilidades en curso y los cortes intermitentes de electricidad, así como el acceso limitado a Internet de alta velocidad y a las TIC necesarias para el aprendizaje. Otros retos se refieren a la adaptación, la nostalgia y las limitadas opciones para organizar actividades educativas y cognitivas, entre otros. Utilizando un enfoque de análisis empírico de datos, el autor lleva a cabo una evaluación cuantitativa y cualitativa exhaustiva de los resultados de la investigación. La evaluación permite identificar los métodos y técnicas más eficaces utilizados por los profesores ucranianos cuando trabajan con niños afectados por la guerra. Se destaca la importancia de la flexibilidad y la adaptabilidad en la planificación educativa, incluida la necesidad de modificar el modo dual de aprendizaje en las instituciones educativas, aplicando la combinación de formatos síncronos y asíncronos en las interacciones pedagógicas e individualizando los enfoques de enseñanza.

Palabras clave: niños de la guerra, educación ucraniana en tiempos de guerra, proceso educativo, métodos de enseñanza a distancia.

Introduction

Following the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces on February 24, 2022, a significant number of Ukrainians experienced profound losses, including the loss of loved ones, homes, employment, and businesses, and the disruption of their comfortable living conditions. Consequently, many people were forced to relocate to safer regions within the country. Numerous schools have been destroyed, resulting in the introduction of remote learning in many educational institutions. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of students were forced to leave dangerous regions, seeking refuge in other countries such as Europe, Canada, and America. During the initial months of this devastating conflict, a considerable number of women and children temporarily relocated westward due to the extensive shelling of civilians and the prevailing air raid threats. “... *More than 3.62 million refugees from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe. Poland granted the highest number of temporary protection statuses to Ukrainians fleeing Ukraine due to Russia’s invasion – more than 1.2 million. Poland was followed by Germany and the Czech Republic, respectively*” (Sas, 2022).

In the history of Western and Eastern Europe, nations had already faced similar problems during the Second World War, when the authorities of many countries tried to evacuate children from cities to remote villages or overseas, separating them from their parents. They faced similar challenges at the time: lack of classrooms and textbooks, and teachers were sent to the war front along with their parents. For example, even in Britain, where preparations had been made in advance for the safe evacuation of children, it was impossible to organize adequate education for all. Moreover, on the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, Germany gradually turned children into obedient slaves in need of primary education. It is worth highlighting that during that period, an underground educational system was established in Poland, providing education to approximately one and a half million students. Nevertheless, a generation of children was unable to get a general education.

In the contemporary conditions, Russia’s strategy and tactics of war (which regrettably possess the potential to escalate into World War III) have evolved, characterized by the usage of increasingly brutal weaponry and inflicting severe physical and psychological traumas upon children. Concerning the education of Ukrainian children in periods of martial law, the rapid advancements in technology have broadened the range of opportunities for diverse forms of online and offline education. However, given the potential security threat to Europe

as a whole, the issue of interdisciplinary study concerning war-affected children, especially in the context of the twenty-first century, is very relevant.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to examine the historical, pedagogical, and axiological aspects concerning children who have experienced diverse forms of trauma due to the russian-Ukrainian war, and (2) to identify the common challenges encountered by Ukrainian teachers when working with students affected by russian military aggression, (3) to find out the most efficient methods and techniques for effective engagement of war-affected children, particularly those temporarily displaced due to the war in Ukraine; (4) to identify fields for teacher training in organizing the educational process within the context of martial law by analyzing scientific sources, internet resources, and the results of empirical research.

Research methods

The analytical approach was implemented to conduct research of scientific-pedagogical literature and Internet sources for the analysis of historical, pedagogical, and axiological aspects of crimes against children in the russian-Ukrainian war (2022-2023).

The online questionnaire survey method was used to identify the psychological challenges encountered while working with Ukrainian children who have been affected by war trauma, as well as to understand the distinctive aspects of their distance learning experiences during wartime. This method enabled teachers to provide information through written responses to a system of standardized questions provided by GoogleForms.

Narrative interviews with selected teachers (qualitative research method) are aimed at deepening our awareness of the phenomena under study, in particular, identifying their psychological and pedagogical experiences, and emotional feelings regarding work with children who have suffered war trauma. In this study, we used the concept of Fritz Schütze (1983), which is based on the distinction between narrative assessments (direct narratives about events) of the war situation and the conditions of children who ended up in it.

The empirical data analysis method was used for quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey results obtained from the research. The article focuses mainly on the qualitative interpretation of the research findings through the theoretical generalization of the individual experience of the authors, respondents, and intuition.

Instruments and Procedures of Research

During the study period, a questionnaire was created to facilitate an online survey focused on teachers who were active in Ukrainian schools during the full-scale Russian military invasion. However, during the survey, these teachers were predominantly internally displaced individuals due to the occupation or bombardment of their settlements. The study encompassed a sample of 68 teachers, selected through a random sampling method. The questionnaire was distributed to diverse educational institutions, including those forced to relocate to different regions within Ukraine during the period of martial law. The survey was conducted in April-May 2022, specifically during the initial months of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The questionnaires were created to reflect theoretical research on social support (Bezpalko, 2014; Semyhina, 2020), psycho-emotional support (Filonenko, 2008), and pedagogical support for war-affected persons (Budnyk, Kushniruk, Tsybulko, Shevchenko, Fomin, & Konovalchuk, 2022; Budnyk, & Sajdak-Burska, 2023). All survey participants were guaranteed anonymity. The questions of the questionnaire provided the respondents with a choice of one or more response options. The participants, who were secondary school teachers, played a vital role in examining aspects concerning the organizing of the educational process, including distance learning, for students in crises. Significant focus was placed on their firsthand experience using specific e-resources in the educational process.

Research Results

Historical, Pedagogical, and Axiological Aspects of Crimes Against Children in the Russian-Ukrainian War (2022-2023)

Modern scholars (historians, political scientists, sociologists, cultural studies experts, educators) are trying to explain the situation in Ukraine, the preconditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, axiological and anthropological factors, etc. Without delving into an extensive analysis, the inherent existential characteristics of Ukrainians are apparent. The absence of patriotism or a sense of freedom, along with the lack of national interests, signifies the potential risk of losing this war against the Russian occupier. On the other side, there is a unique mental and anthropological archetype of Ukrainians marked by noble moral principles like patriotism, national solidarity, dignity, heroism, and self-sacrifice for the sake of the Motherland. Despite facing numerous challenges, this unique Ukrainian spirit enables

resistance against the enemy, even in the face of overwhelming odds. Such steadfastness not only upholds Ukrainian spirituality but also reinforces the foundation of the state.

Throughout the centuries, Ukrainians have consistently shown peacefulness and a deep sense of spirituality, a feature presented in their legislative texts. An instance of this can be found in Article 2 of the Ukrainian Law “On Protection of Public Morality” (2003), where fundamental principles of tolerance and compassionate treatment towards individuals from “different backgrounds” are explicitly stated: “*The production and dissemination of materials that endorse or propagate the following are strictly prohibited in Ukraine: war, national and religious animosity, violent alteration of the constitutional order or territorial integrity of the country; fascism and neo-fascism; derogatory or offensive content based on nationality; incitement to outrage, blasphemy, or disrespect towards national and religious symbols; and actions that demean or humiliate individuals ...*” (Law..., 2003). Evidently, in totalitarian nations like Russia, moral principles are disregarded, particularly during times of war. This is exemplified by the widespread atrocities and acts of violence perpetrated against the civilian population of Ukraine since the full-scale conflict (2022-2023), particularly targeting innocent children.

The Children of War website contains information about Ukrainian children killed, wounded, missing, or deported to Russia since the beginning of the war (since February 24th, 2022), and the information is constantly updated (Fig. 1). This portal is a universal communication channel with law enforcement agencies: the National Police of Ukraine, the Office of the Prosecutor General, and the National Information Bureau. On the website, anyone can report crimes committed against children, as well as information about an unaccompanied child found, deportation, forced change of citizenship/documents, or violation of other rights during the war.

Figure 1 – Children of War portal (screenshot).



Source: <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>

As an illustration, as of June 10th, the portal has recorded data regarding 1,501 children who have been forcibly relocated (to Russia and Belarus), 487 children who have tragically lost their lives, 1,014 children who have sustained injuries, and so on. It is crucial to emphasize that these figures hold significance not merely as statistics, but primarily as a means to facilitate the search and safe return of Ukrainian children to their homeland. The platform is available in three languages – Ukrainian, English, and Russian (the language of the aggressor country) – to gather extensive information and provide assistance primarily to the children affected by the war and their families. Considering the escalating nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it becomes crucial to spread the information from the Children of War portal in multiple languages worldwide. This approach would help ensure that psychological and pedagogical support is accompanied by tangible actions, encompassing respect for fundamental human dignity and the child's rights. Because the totalitarian regime of the last century cannot use its barbaric methods of extermination, robbery, kidnapping, deportation... in the twenty-first century, even under martial law.

In his book “Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations” (1977), M. Walzer advocates for the concept of a just war, wherein a nation safeguards its territory or upholds moral and spiritual principles. According to this theory, deliberate attacks on civilians, destruction of their property or infrastructure, and the most horrific act of all, the killing of children, are strictly condemned. M. Walzer's statements – *jus ad bellum and jus in*

bello – are widely used by scholars for discussions in the social sciences and humanities. The (in)justice of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the failure to comply with the basic rules of military ethics by the Russian occupier is obvious to most progressive countries in Europe, America, and Canada. N. Golovina, who considers moral dilemmas to be one of the most relevant factors of the war (Golovina, 2022, p. 13-14), discusses ethical principles in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

Another, no less important aspect of teaching children of war is their adaptation to the conditions of the socio-cultural and educational environment of other countries. Based on the analysis of the concept of Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, et al., 2010) about the diversity of national cultures, A. Młynarczuk-Sokołowska notes that “... *cultural difference is one of many dimensions of a child's subjectivity and it determines the cultural nature of his or her identity and personality*”. “*The analyses of situations where cultures meet to show that conflict often results from different values, beliefs, needs, etc. The new culture may arouse many emotions and questions among people experiencing migration. From the perspective of a host society, the behaviors of children and their parents may be perceived as strange and/or inadequate to the situation*” (Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2020, p. 153). Under such circumstances, a considerable population of Ukrainian children, estimated to be around 2 million according to various sources, were forced to reside in foreign countries due to the ongoing war.

“*The list of atrocities committed by Russia continues to pile on. Several reports, including a statement by Ukraine's ambassador to the UN, claim that Russian troops forcibly detained and transported 121,000 children from the shelled city of Mariupol to the Russian city of Taganrog in an attempt to accelerate them through the adoption process*” (Ukrainian Adoption System, 2022). This primarily pertains to children who belong to highly vulnerable social groups, such as orphans and those whose parents have fallen victim to the actions of the Russian military. The large-scale deportation of Ukrainian children affected by the war, from territories occupied by the Russian aggressor, poses a significant risk to the safety and well-being of these orphans, in particular. It is of utmost importance to safeguard their legal identification and maintain their ties with the cultural and educational environment they were part of before the outbreak of the war.

On the temporarily occupied territories, children are deprived of the chance to attend Ukrainian-language schools and their reliance on Russian textbooks for education serves as evidence of the ideological manipulation and moral mistreatment inflicted upon Ukrainian

children. They are required to listen to and learn the Russian national anthem several times a day. “... *The Russian authorities are depriving Ukrainian children of their right to preserve their identity, use their native language, culture, and other rights as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, committing serious violations of international humanitarian law...*” (Children of War: Kidnapping, 2023).

Russian barbarians are trying to recruit kidnapped Ukrainian children to the “Russian world”. For this purpose, they use schools and children’s camps in the territories they occupy. According to scientists from Yale University, “minors are subjected to forced political re-education” in so-called “camps”, (Ukraine calls “genocide” transporting children to Russia). According to online sources, it has been reported that over 70 camps have been established for forcibly relocated children in Ukrainian territories occupied by the Russian aggressor (“It’s terrible what they’re doing to them there”, 2023). In these camps, children are subjected to narratives claiming that Ukraine has initiated aggression and is engaged in committing Nazi atrocities. Additionally, propaganda speeches are often delivered by famous Russian individuals such as actors, artists, athletes, bloggers, and others, contributing to the further dissemination of such misinformation. Considering the vulnerable state of children’s mental well-being, having already endured the trauma of war, and the loss of loved ones, and witnessed destruction and death in their immediate surroundings due to extensive shelling, they are now subjected to further psychological distress. Ukrainian children are being subjected to a process of russification, where the occupiers impose the use of the Russian language, attempt to provide them with Russian passports, and manipulate them into believing that they have been abandoned by their parents and will never return to Ukraine (This is not Ukraine, 2023). Russian mercenaries are trying to completely “break” them morally and deprive them of everything Ukrainian, identity, family, national memory, language, etc.

M. Rembierz, in his examination of the pedagogical and anthropological dimensions of war crimes committed against Polish children during World War II, highlights the Germanization policy enforced on Polish families. According to Rembierz, these children were deprived of the opportunity to be raised in the Polish cultural spirit “*They had no right to communicate or hear their native language, even in the family circle*”. Consequently, this systematic approach led to the destruction of the cultural identity of the Polish population, as the German language was imposed, and a campaign of forced denationalization was conducted (Rembierz, 2020, p. 41-42). Remarkably, the Russian occupiers in 2022-2023 in Ukraine’s territory are following similar patterns, effectively mirroring the actions of the

fascists who perpetrated widespread atrocities against children, including Polish and Jewish children, during the European conflicts.

The war crimes committed by the Russian authorities can be attributed to the effects of imperial rule and the prevailing education system under totalitarianism. The deliberate policy of destroying the cultural identity of a specific population becomes feasible through continuous ideological control fulfilled by the state apparatus (Rembierz, 2020, p. 26). This aligns with the current regime of supremacy in the Russian Federation, focused on senselessly dismantling other nations and cultures, particularly targeting children who represent the future. As stated by Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the Ukrainian people cannot envision a prosperous future or engage in meaningful discussions about nation-building and societal development without prioritizing the proper upbringing and education of their children. This period is of utmost significance as it involves a struggle for the survival of the nation, the preservation of Ukrainian identity, and its rich culture. The children of Ukraine today are the children of war, who represent one of the most vulnerable groups within Ukrainian society. As Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk emphasizes, *a significant portion, if not the majority, of the millions of Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons are children of various ages* (Shevchuk, 2022). Hence, a crucial objective of our research has been to examine the unique aspects of pedagogical work with children who have personally witnessed the harsh realities and suffering caused by the war.

Challenges of Working with Students Affected by the War in Ukraine

To discern the most urgent concerns regarding the education of children in times of martial law, it is vital to seek the insights of teachers who were sharing the most harrowing ordeals, destruction, and profound loss. In present-day Ukraine, certain educators are emulating the remarkable Janusz Korczak's actions, a Polish teacher who showed extraordinary heroism (Korczak, 2009). Despite having the opportunity to save his life, Korczak chose to stay with his students from the Jewish Orphanage and tragically perished with them in a Nazi gas chamber in 1942. His unwavering commitment to professional and moral responsibility serves as an inspiration for educators today. *“Examine your own large and calloused hand in comparison to your child's small and delicate hand. Notice the contrast between your rough skin and their smooth and thin skin. Observe the little ones, completely reliant on you, without the strength to protect themselves or assert their rights. It*

is challenging to find a parallel in the life of an adult. No longer driven solely by passion, every strike carries a weight akin to that of a convicted prisoner.” (Brzezińska-Waleszczyk, 2016).

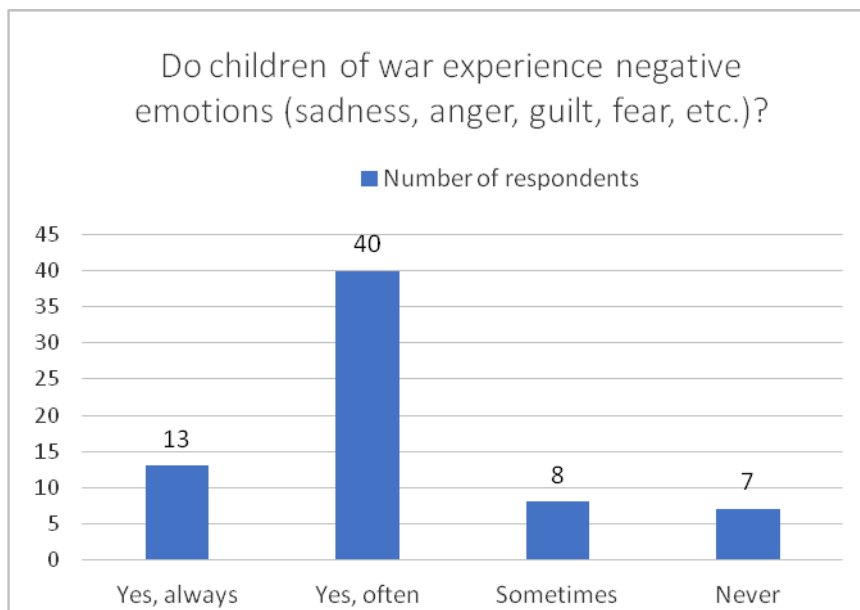
Disregarding the child’s dignity, and showing disrespect to them as a young individual, carries a significantly greater impact when perpetrated by an adult. The child’s soul is defenseless, lacking the ability to protect itself. Violence begets rudeness and malice, emphasizing the importance of kindness, warm smiles, and the wisdom of parents and educators in nurturing rationality, goodness, and enduring values. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war children’s loss depends on dedicated teachers who bear the responsibility of guiding them.

On the 269th day of the war (2022), Sviatoslav Shevchuk, Head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, declared that *“a teacher in Ukraine is a heroic figure entrusted with shaping the destiny of our nation’s future.”* Ensuring proper upbringing and education is of utmost importance, particularly for children who are relocated to foreign countries, facing different linguistic environments and unfamiliar school systems.

To examine the major challenges encountered by Ukrainian teachers amid the war, we conducted an online survey. The survey encompassed teachers in the temporarily occupied territories or were classified as temporarily displaced individuals within Ukraine or abroad (68 respondents). The sample comprised teachers from the central, eastern, and southern regions of Ukraine, where schools had been partially or destroyed. Consequently, children in these regions were profoundly impacted by a range of traumas, including anxiety, stress, depression, self-imposed social isolation, reticence to communicate, aggression, antisocial conduct, criminal behavior, as well as physical injuries resulting from explosions and other incidents.

The illustrations provided (2a, 2b, 2c, 2d) depict the challenges and issues mentioned by respondents when it comes to educating children affected by war.

Figure 2a – Challenges of working with children impacted by the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

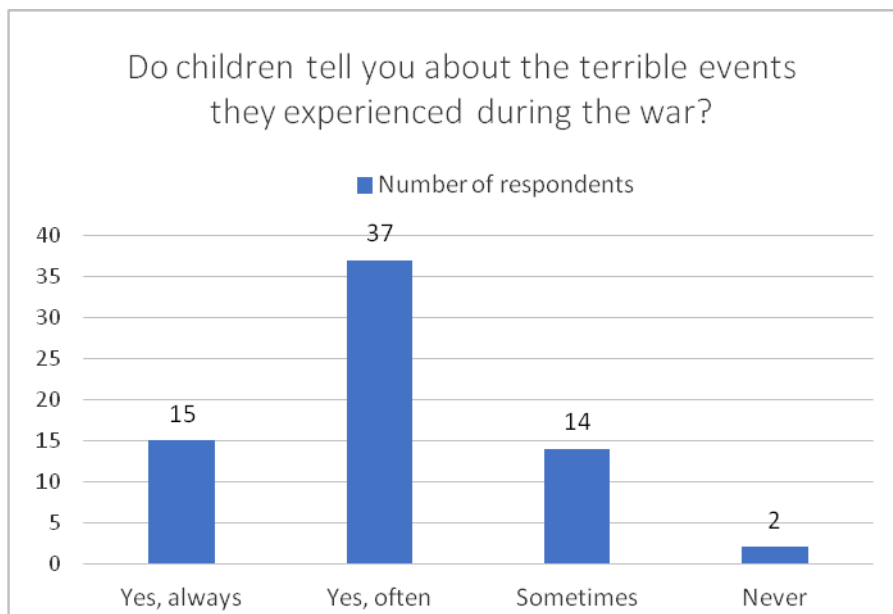


Source: The survey was conducted by the authors of the article.

As an illustration, out of the total respondents, 40 teachers (58.8%), indicated that they frequently noticed their students' psycho-emotional trauma. Around 19.1% (13 respondents) reported constant effects of stress and negative experiences, while 10.3% (7 persons) mentioned these states occasionally. The next survey question was about how often children talk about their anxiety, negative experiences during the war, losses, etc. As can be seen in Fig. 2b, the majority of the respondents (37 persons, or 54.4%) claim that they often talk to children about the war, 22% always do it and only 2.9% never discuss it.

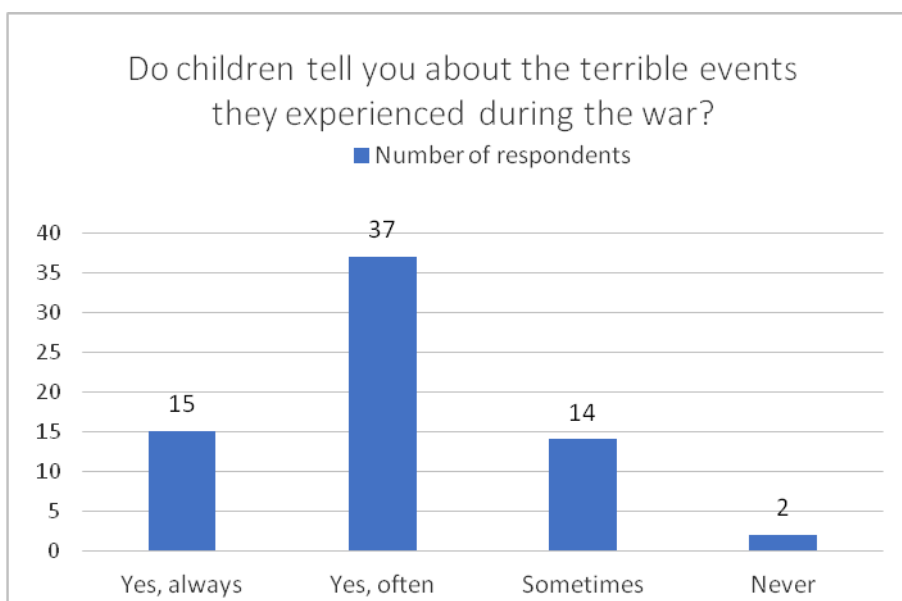
Psychologists emphasize the importance of engaging in conversations with students who have experienced war trauma, but it is crucial to administer this information in appropriate doses. Adopting an "avoidance", which refrains from discussing complex and psychologically challenging subjects with children, hinders their understanding, ability to display empathy, and capacity to process traumatic experiences effectively. By addressing these issues and helping students work through their emotional wounds, they can begin the healing process and overcome the trauma they have endured. Consequently, within a relatively secure educational setting, fostering empathy will facilitate a positive adjustment to the prevailing circumstances. This empathetic approach allows for the sharing of diverse traumatic experiences and, in collaboration with parents, enables timely recognition of a child's feelings or negative shifts in their psychological well-being.

Figure 2b – Problems faced by teachers in working with Ukrainian children affected by the war.



Source: The survey was conducted by the authors of the article.

Figure 2c – Problems faced by teachers in working with Ukrainian children affected by the war.



Source: The survey was conducted by the authors of the article.

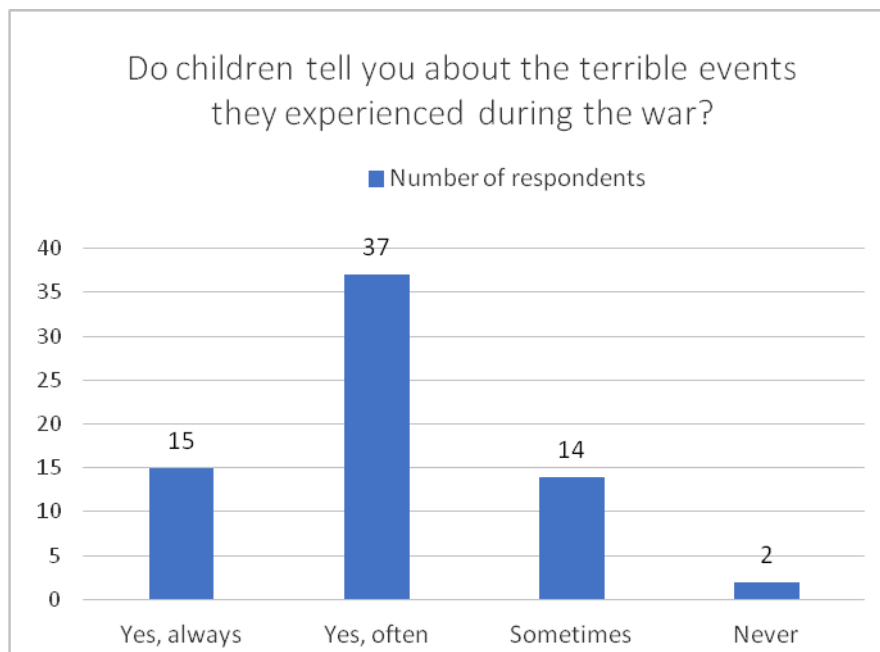
In the broader context, most scholars (O. Bezpalko, T. Semygina, and others) interpret social support as the creation of appropriate conditions or assistance to solve a particular problem of a particular person who is in difficult life conditions or facing certain challenges (Bezpalko, 2014; Semygina, 2020). In our case, it is social and pedagogical assistance to children of war who struggle to integrate into the school educational environment. M. Filonenko, emphasizing the psychological component of social support, defines this concept

as a feeling (sense) of support from others. Thus, the researcher concludes that social support includes the following components: (1) emotional support ('confidence that someone cares about you, loves you and takes care of you'); (2) evaluative support ('social comparison and answering the question whether I have the right attitude to a particular phenomenon'); (3) informational support ('information on how to perceive phenomena'); (4) instrumental support ('receiving specific and effective help') (Filonenko, 2008, p. 18–19).

In periods of martial law, a teacher assumes multiple roles of a psychologist, a friend, and a confidant, ready to share sadness, fear, and despair. While some children tend to isolate themselves and discuss the war reluctantly, others express aggression, irritability, and hyper-excitement. Depression, headaches, and various other symptoms are frequently observed as well. Hence, in the educational realm, be it online or in a school basement during an air raid alarm, it is crucial to approach children individually, considering their unique traumatic experiences and the circumstances they are presently confronting. Pedagogical interaction during the process of learning, development, or upbringing demands meticulous attention to every word, thought, and behavior while maintaining the utmost respect for the feelings and dignity of the student, even amidst crisis conditions caused by war.

Apart from the array of psycho-emotional challenges encountered by those involved in the educational process during times of war (students, parents, teachers), it is essential to effectively structure the educational process from a didactic standpoint, considering safety requirements to safeguard life and well-being. In the Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by external forces, the issue of education in the native Ukrainian language remains pertinent. This is due to the imposition of forced russification, along with the distressing occurrences of child kidnapping and deportation to Russia and Belarus. As of April 22, 2023, nearly 20 thousand cases of forcibly removed children have been verified, although the actual number could potentially reach 200-300 thousand, as highlighted by D. Gerasymchuk in the publication "It's terrible what they're doing to them there" (2023).

Figure 2d – Problems faced by teachers in working with Ukrainian children affected by war.



Source: The survey was conducted by the authors of the article.

Under such conditions, the teaching staff of educational institutions share a common vision of predicting the phasing of work under martial law. This is particularly relevant in cities and villages across Ukraine, even those considered relatively safe, where periodic air raid alarms are heard or incidents of missile strikes, referred to as “arrivals,” may occur. Hence, it is crucial to ensure that all educational institutions that have not transitioned to remote learning are equipped with secure shelters capable of accommodating all individuals involved in the educational process. These shelters would provide a safe environment where students can continue their studies in case of danger. Simultaneously, all educational institutions possess platforms for teaching students or facilitating their creative endeavors through the implementation of distance or blended learning. This signifies a form of innovation and a novel educational policy not only for schools and universities in Ukraine but also a valuable experience in organizing the educational process amid the twenty-first-century warfare (Budnyk, Kushniruk & Tsybulko, 2022, p. 470), which is taking place in the geographical center of Europe, in Ukraine.

Digital technologies in the work of teachers and students greatly help to put this experience into practice (Tsenda & Budnyk, 2021). However, personal interaction and an individual approach to learning are of great importance, so whenever possible, there are recommendations from education departments to work with students directly in the classroom.

It is worth highlighting that both students and teachers willingly offered their assistance to children who were displaced from the war-affected areas to the central or western regions of the country. This display of patriotism, national unity, elevated spirituality, and humanism serves as an inspiration for all participants in pedagogical interactions, fostering positive emotions and instilling faith in the ultimate triumph over the enemy.

Here are a few testimonials from Ukrainian educators and students (future teachers) sharing their experiences of teaching children who have been affected by the war with Russia.

Anna H., currently pursuing a Master's Degree at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University and also serving as a teacher at Kryla Private Gymnasium in Ivano-Frankivsk:

"I am consistently amazed by the children's unwavering thirst for knowledge, even in the face of the traumatic experiences of war. Over time, I have witnessed the gradual emergence of sincerity and trust in their interactions with both their peers and teachers. It brings me immense joy to have had the chance to assist them in pursuing their dreams and facilitating their growth. Our gymnasium operates under the motto "We will teach you to fly." This motto became particularly significant as we worked with students who relocated to our institution from regions profoundly affected by the devastating consequences of war, including Kherson, Mariupol, Luhansk, Donetsk, and Mykolaiv. Through my interactions with these students, I realized that their understanding of war transcended the innocence typically associated with childhood. Having endured immense fear caused by the loss of their homes, loved ones, and friends, their perspective had been profoundly shaped. Consequently, I cherish the opportunity to play a part in shaping their promising futures, nurturing genuine human and national values, and striving to minimize the recollection (though impossible to completely forget) of the horrors inflicted by war".

This teacher is deeply impressed by the strength of children unexpectedly confronted with traumatic events and coping with stress. According to psychological research (Fernando, & Ferrari, 2013), children have a huge potential for resilience, enabling them to recover from trauma and become complete individuals. However, this involves the support of adults and the use of effective coping strategies and healing techniques. That is why it is so crucial to create a favorable and comfortable educational environment for students during the war (and above all, a safe one!) so that they can return to their normal lives and study as much as possible under these circumstances.

Nataliya K., primary school teacher at Kryla Private Gymnasium in Ivano-Frankivsk:

“During the lesson, I was struck by the fact that the students who suffered the war trauma, maintain a steadfast belief in victory, exhibit unwavering faith in the future prosperity of Ukraine, hold an active patriotic stance, and hope that their parents, bravely defending the country against Russian occupiers, will undoubtedly return home. Remarkably, this transformation has taken place after enduring over 100 days of war! Our children have matured significantly throughout this period, acquiring the ability to discern between false and true values and to differentiate between genuine and unfounded anxieties”.

Maria K., a teacher at Lyceum No. 23 named after Roman Huryk in Ivano-Frankivsk:

“During the initial days of the war, we were on a vacation period and had no communication with the students. Upon our first reunion following a two-week break, we noticed that the children appeared noticeably more tense, agitated, and apprehensive. However, as we continued with online lessons in the subsequent weeks, we observed a gradual transformation in their demeanor, with the students becoming calmer and more composed. In my class, there were no students who came from the occupied territories or those who had moved from the active war zone. However, I noticed that the children who stayed in the city were extremely tired and psychologically exhausted, their attention was scattered, and they were less active. When I asked them about this, it turned out that most of them could not sleep because alarms often sounded, and they had to go to a shelter, a safer place with their parents. Therefore, my students’ eyes lack enthusiasm, a light for knowledge, concentration, and a desire to learn...”.

As we can observe, teachers who have worked with children relocated to western Ukraine because of the war are unanimous in their opinion that these students have suffered significant psycho-emotional trauma and need proper pedagogical assistance, including in their studies. During military aggression, children are much more likely than adults to suffer from such problems as anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, dissociative and behavioral disorders, etc. Because long-term exposure to violence increases the risk of developing many forms of physical, psychological, and social disadaptation, it is crucial to provide them with prompt, qualified assistance, primarily from pedagogical staff – teachers, educators, social workers, inclusive education assistants, etc. According to the interviewed teachers, students who have seen the war with their own eyes have some communication barriers not only in the educational environment but also in the social environment, because they have “closed themselves off” for some time in their suffering. Therefore, teachers are unanimous in their opinion that unconventional methods of individualized approach to teaching, education, and development are required to develop productive psychological, social, and pedagogical strategies to overcome these difficulties.

Conclusions

Amidst the challenging period of Russian military aggression, the advancement of educational policy and the implementation of innovations in Ukraine emerge as exceptionally crucial domains for educational institutions of diverse types. Even during the “active phase” of the war, it is essential to uphold children’s right to education. Hence, it becomes imperative to establish suitable conditions to facilitate this, and the Ukrainian education system is demonstrating adaptability in addressing these challenges. It is acquiring invaluable experience in operating and progressing under the circumstances of martial law.

The principle of innovation within educational institutions primarily entails a transformation in the responsibilities of its leadership, goals, content, organizational structures, and work methodologies. It also emphasizes fostering partnerships within the professional and pedagogical environment. Modern Ukrainian schools and universities are focused on integration into the European (world) space and such principles as patriotism, solidarity, compliance with social challenges in the development of science and technology, partnership, sustainability, innovation, compliance with international and national professional quality standards for the training of highly qualified specialists. The ongoing war has showcased the aspirations of Ukrainians towards European values and educational standards, which are progressively being incorporated despite the existing crisis.

Typical difficulties faced by teachers in working with students who have experienced war trauma are identified: communication problems due to stress; psycho-emotional experiences, depressive states; unstable learning conditions; limited ways of organizing educational and cognitive activities; periodic air raids, hostilities, shelling of territories, stabilization power outages; difficulties in adapting displaced students to new conditions of the educational environment; nostalgia for home, friends, teachers; often lack of interest in educational and cognitive activities; lack of access to high-speed Internet or technical means, etc.

The results of the teacher survey revealed problems in the education of children who became victims of the Russian aggression in Ukraine: 77.9% of teachers reported psycho-emotional trauma that always or often serves as a barrier to learning (19.1% and 58.8% of respondents, respectively); therefore, these students always (16.2%) or often (33.8%) try to avoid talking about the war, miss their school, friends, teachers who are still in the temporarily occupied territory (73.5%), etc.

Teachers overcome these new challenges primarily by implementing the most effective methods and techniques for working with children of war, including those temporarily displaced by the war in the country, and thus by being flexible and adaptive in planning the educational process, changing the operating hours of the educational institution, combining synchronous or asynchronous formats in the study of certain topics, using various forms of pedagogical interaction: teamwork, pair work, practical and laboratory work, etc.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the unstable psycho-emotional condition experienced by both teachers and parents, which will be the focus of further in-depth investigations in our upcoming research publications.

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