
ORGANISATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION AT WAR IN UKRAINE: RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION SPECIALISTS



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Abstract. *The article presents the results of a survey of primary education specialists on the organization of primary school education in the period after the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and May 31, 2022 (the official end of the 2021–2022 academic year). The survey was conducted by scholars of the Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine. The article is based on the legislative and regulatory documents governing the legal regime of martial law in Ukraine and the peculiarities of the functioning of the Ukrainian education system during this period; analytical works, including the author's own, on the organization of education under martial law; characteristics of primary education: The guidelines of international organizations on the organization of education in times of war were also taken into account. The results of the survey showed that primary education in Ukraine continued to function after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, despite serious challenges (destruction or damage to educational institutions due to bombing and shelling, forced displacement of teachers and parents with children, numerous psychological traumas of teachers and children, occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine and genocide of the Ukrainian people in the occupied territories). This became possible both due to the creation of the foundations of institutional and legal regulation of the educational sphere for the period of martial law by the Ukrainian authorities, and to the specialists of primary education: their civic position, moral responsibility, professional qualifications. The conclusions developed on the basis of the respondents' answers outline possible options for organizing primary education in war conditions. The relevance of further development of the distance learning format in Ukraine under martial law and the implementation of a systemic policy of the authorities to support teachers, which should include both psychological support and the development of methodological support for teaching in war conditions, emphasized.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, war, primary education, primary education specialists, survey, organisational conditions, perspectives.*

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM STATEMENT

With the declaration of independence in 1991, Ukraine began building a sovereign democratic state. The attempts of the Russian Federation to restore the Russian empire and control over a part of the world lost with the collapse of the USSR have become the reason for the aggressive anti-Ukrainian policy. Under Putin's presidency, Russia's return to global hegemony is seen as impossible without the capture of Ukraine. This led to open Russian armed aggression, starting with the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a large-scale military invasion of Ukraine with the aim of the genocide of the Ukrainian people, elimination of statehood and annexation of territory.

The war brought grief and death to Ukrainians, causing terrible harm to children. According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, since the beginning of the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine 459 children were killed, and 909 injured (Ofis Heneralnoho Prokurora, 2022).

The war in Ukraine has caused the destruction of the network of educational institutions. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 3045 educational institutions suffered from bombing and shelling. 424 of them were completely destroyed (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2022).

“Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and children, pupils, teachers and academics have been killed, maimed, abducted or arbitrarily detained. Educational facilities have been used by parties to armed conflict as; inter alia, bases, barracks or detention centres. Such actions expose pupils and education personnel to harm, deny large numbers of children and pupils their right to education and so deprive communities of the

foundations on which to build their future. In many countries, armed conflict continues to destroy not just school infrastructure, but the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children”, the Safe Schools Declaration states (GCPEA, 2015).

It is important in times of war to continue the learning process in a different way, so that pupils have access to education despite the interruption of the regular education system, as emphasized by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack in the document “What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Schools from Military Use. A Menu of Actions” (GCPEA, 2015a).

In order to resume the educational process, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine within a short time has formed the principles of institutional and legal regulation of the educational sphere for the period of martial law. Such regulation is carried out in accordance with the Law of Ukraine “On the Legal Regime of Martial Law” of 12.05.2015 No. 389-VIII (as amended) (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2015). Decree of the President of Ukraine “On the introduction of martial law in Ukraine” of 24.02.2022 No. 64/202210 (Prezydent Ukrainy, 2022), approved by the Law of Ukraine of 24.02.2022 No. 2102-IX; Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “On the organization of the educational process in the conditions of hostilities” of 06.03.2022 No. 1/3371-22 (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2022a); Orders of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “On some issues of organization of work of institutions of professional pre-higher, higher education for the period of martial law” dated 07.03.2022 No. 235 (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2022b); “On some issues of the organization of general secondary education and the educational process under martial law in Ukraine” of 28.03.2022 No. 274 (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2022c); Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine “On the organization of the educational process in primary school in wartime” of 29.03.2022 No. 1/3725-22 (Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrainy, 2022d), etc. have formed an institutional basis for the continuation of education, protection of the participants in the educational process, preservation of property of educational institutions, and evacuation measures if necessary.

However, it is obvious that pupils and teachers were forced to continue their studies in unusual conditions or the educational process was suspended in some regions. In order to study the state of primary education in Ukraine under martial law, scholars of the Institute of Pedagogy of the National Academy of Educational Sciences (NAES) of Ukraine studied the opinion of primary education specialists. This became possible thanks to the joint work of the scholars of the Institute, who are engaged in a wide range of issues of primary education development, and teachers-practitioners of general secondary education institutions.

The purpose of the article is to present the results of a survey of primary education specialists on the organization of primary education in Ukraine under martial law.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a situation where war is raging in many regions of the world, international organizations within the framework of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), the InterAgency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and other structures/centres/foundations are actively working to develop guidelines for the systems of education. The authors of the article have studied the provisions substantiated in the Safe Schools Declaration (GCPEA, 2015) and What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Schools from Military Use: A Menu of Actions (GCPEA, 2015a).

The ideas of the international community on a comprehensive approach to the organization of the educational process based on the principle of security and equal access to education for all were valuable for the development of the questionnaire (Lokshyna (Red.), 2022).

The article is based on legislative and regulatory documents that regulate the legal regime of martial law in Ukraine and the peculiarities of the functioning of the Ukrainian education system during this period (Laws of Ukraine, Decrees of the President of Ukraine, orders and letters of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine) (2022).

The article uses the results of the studies, including the author's own, on characteristics of primary education (Onopriienko, 2021; Bibik & Pavlova, 2022); guidelines for organizing education in the face of crises and war (Burda & Vasylieva, 2022; Lokshyna & Topuzov, 2021; Tverdokhlib, 2022); opinions of the participants of the educational process under martial law (Melnyk, 2022).

The use of literary sources is indicated in the presentation of the main material.

METHODOLOGY

The study covered the time period from February 24, 2022 (the beginning of the large-scale war) to May 31, 2022 (the official end of the academic year).

As a tool, a questionnaire was used, in which blocks of questions were concentrated and dosed, including the block "Organization of the educational process". Within the framework of this block, the following issues were studied:

the way of organizing the educational process; availability of technical resources for educational activities; provision of communication; characteristics of organizational conditions for children's education; duration of classes; format of organization of classes; availability of educational materials for children; teachers' access to teaching materials. The format of the questionnaire included a combination of test questions (with a choice of one or more acceptable answers from the proposed options) and questions that provided an open answer of the survey participants.

The respondents were selected from among the members of Facebook communities of educators working in the area of primary education. Potential survey participants were sent an invitation to participate in the event in private messages, which indicated the initiators, purpose and approximate scope of questions. After giving consent from the practicing teachers, they were sent a text document with a questionnaire via e-mail. Regulations for providing answers were not established. The method of sending the completed questionnaire was chosen by the survey participants themselves.

The survey involved 56 respondents from 20 regions of Ukraine and the city of Kyiv. They represent all regions of Ukraine, including those where active military operations are underway or temporarily under the occupation of the aggressor.

There were 54 women (96.5% of the respondents) and 2 men (almost 3.5%), which relevantly reflects the gender distribution of specialists working in the area of primary education in our country.

As for the age composition the sample is dominated by teachers aged 50 – 59 (almost 39.5%) (Table 1).

Table 1

Age of the respondents

| Age (in years) | Number | % |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|
| under 30 years old | 2 | almost 3.5% |
| 30 – 39 years old | 9 | 16% |
| 40 – 49 years old | 16 | almost 28.5% |
| 50 – 59 years old | 22 | almost 39.5% |
| over 60 years old | 7 | 12.5% |

This quantitative distribution fully reflects the representation of primary education specialists in Ukraine by age.

All survey participants are specialists in primary education. 2 of them (3.5%) have a professional Bachelor's degree; the rest – 54 people (96.5%) – are specialists with complete higher pedagogical education (Master degree). 11 respondents (19.6%) have additional specialization, namely 3 teachers have an additional specialty of practical psychologist, 3 – computer science teacher, 1 – choreography teacher, 1 – music teacher, 1 – Ukrainian language and literature teacher, 1 – geography teacher, 1 -- history teacher.

43 teachers (76.8%) who participated in the survey have the highest qualification category, including 8 (14%) – with the title of teacher-methodologist and the same number – with the title of senior teacher. 50 respondents (89%) work as primary school teachers; 6 persons (11%) combine the work of a teacher with the position of deputy headmaster.

Thus, the participants of the survey have a sufficiently high level of professional awareness and professional experience, which allows us to rely on their considerations regarding the analysis of the situation to form our conclusions.

All respondents are teachers of general secondary education institutions of I – III levels. 27 (48.2%) of them work in urban area; 29 (51.8%) – in rural area. This distribution of survey participants by the location of the educational institution is close to the statistical indicator for the country (respectively 42.7% and 57.3%).

MAIN RESULTS

According to the survey results, the educational institutions where the respondents work were not displaced during the hostilities. At the same time, 5 respondents (9%) indicated that the settlement where the educational institution is located was occupied by Russian troops during the educational process.

43 respondents (76.8%) indicated that they were in their usual place of residence during classes after 24 February 2022 (i.e. since the beginning of the large-scale war). 11 teachers (19.6%) worked in Ukraine, but in a displaced location. 1 teacher (1.8%) continued her work from abroad, and 1 teacher was unable to perform her professional functions while remaining in the occupied territory. It should be noted that one respondent stated that after conducting classes with her class at her main place of work, she volunteered to conduct online classes for pupils whose teachers were unable to work.

Answering the question: “Have you experienced violence (physical, psychological, administrative, gender, other) during your work since February 24, 2022?” 53 participants gave a negative answer. At the same time, 3 people (5.4%) of those who worked in the enemy-occupied territory testified to manifestations of psychological violence against them, which manifested itself through constant threats of explosions, coercion to cooperate with the occupation authorities.

The educational environment is important for the organisation of the educational process in primary school. It is known that during the war the premises of educational institutions suffered significant destruction. This certainly affects the implementation of educational activities and its quality. Our survey covered the end of the 2021 - 2022 academic year, when the first phase of hostilities lasted:

49 survey participants (87%) indicated that their educational institution was not damaged during the war; 4 participants (7%) stated that their institutions were partially damaged; 2 respondents (3.5%) answered that their educational institutions were completely destroyed; one respondent noted that her educational institution, although it survived, was seized by the occupation authorities;

The data obtained correlate with the percentage of damaged (6%) and destroyed (1%) general secondary education institutions in Ukraine at that time, which confirms the presentability of our findings (Fig. 1).

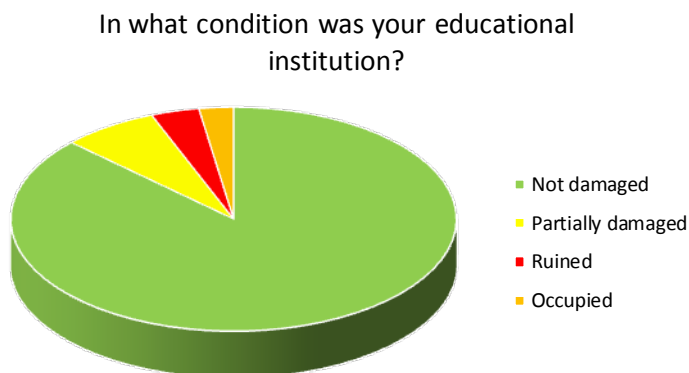


Fig. 1
The condition of the premises of the educational institution

As for the conditions for conducting classes, 18 respondents (32%) noted that they had to work in complicated organizational conditions, and 2 respondents (3.5%) called their working conditions extremely difficult. Describing the complicated and difficult organizational conditions, the respondents made the following clarifications:

– “When I was in my city, there were days when explosions were heard very close to me, but I still organized distance learning. After moving to another region, there was no such problem”;

– “Some pupils were forced to leave Ukraine and studied from abroad. Some parents were not able to provide their children with the full assistance they needed, and this complicated my work”;

– “Until March 31, I had to take my two minor children (10 and 4 years old) to work with me, because the school administration demanded to work remotely from the school premises. Later the administration allowed me to work from a place convenient for me, and this problem disappeared”;

– “There were such difficulties: lack of communication, I delivered notebooks with assignments to pupils’ homes”;

– “I was forced to leave my place of residence and work due to the occupation of the territory by Russian troops. I worked remotely from my phone. Many children who remained in the occupation did not have the Internet. The homework that I assigned to my pupils was passed to each other in a guerrilla way, because the occupiers forbade them to study according to the Ukrainian curriculum”;

– “Under the occupation, it was not possible to teach children. There was a constant threat of shelling, armed people on the streets of the city, lack of mobile communication and the Internet”.

These facts testify to the high degree of moral and civic responsibility of Ukrainian teachers who, despite difficult emotional, moral and physical circumstances, continued to perform their professional duties.

Answering the question about the way the educational process was organized in the educational institution, 43 respondents (76.9%) indicated that it was a distance format without suspension of studies. 10 respondents (17.7%) carried out the educational process in a distance format with the suspension of studies for some time. The main reasons for the suspension were the lack of electricity and Internet. 3 respondents (5.4%), who were in the Russian-occupied territory, indicated that they could not continue or resume the educational process (“In the

conditions of occupation, in the absence of mobile communication and the Internet, it was impossible to resume training”) (Fig. 2).

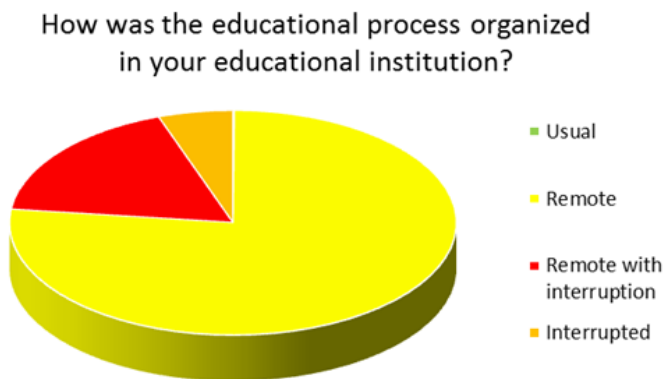


Fig. 2
Training format in educational institutions

The interviewed teachers testified to the relevance of the issue of professional readiness for the organization of the educational process not only in a traditional (full-time) way, but also in a distance format.

The vast majority of teachers (94.6%) during the study period used a personal computer or laptop in their work, 31 respondents (55.3%) used a smartphone as an additional technical means. Their pupils used all available electronic technical means for classes. At the same time, 53 respondents (94.6%) indicated that in addition to a computer, laptop and tablet, children used a smartphone during classes. This fact, on the one hand, emphasizes the desire of pupils to learn, and on the other hand, indicates obvious inconveniences and potential physiological complications, for example, in the form of deterioration of visual acuity, development of nervousness, etc. These data undoubtedly emphasize the need to provide teachers and pupils with appropriate technical means that allow them to quickly switch to distance learning and at the same time do not harm their physical and mental health.

The key objective factor affecting the quality of educational services is the provision of stable Internet connection to the participants of the process. As we can see from the testimonies of teachers, only 31 of them (55.3%) recognized the connection as stable and normal in the forced working conditions. 21 respondents (37.5%) called the connection unstable, intermittent. The rest said that the connection was poor or absent (Fig. 3).

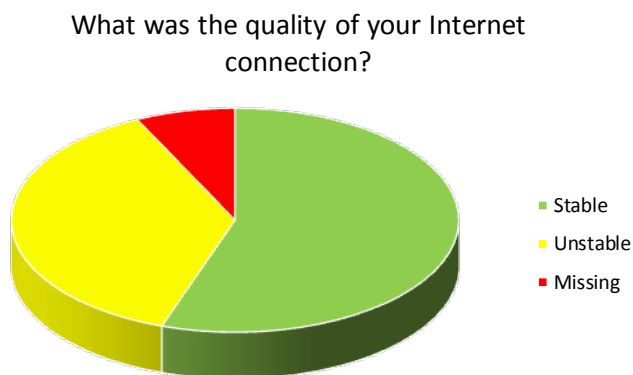


Fig. 3
Availability of stable internet for teachers

Pupils' learning conditions were more complicated. Thus, only 12 respondents (21.4%) indicated that all children were provided with stable Internet. In 39 classes (69.7%), where the surveyed teachers work, the connection was intermittent, and in the rest of the classes (8.9%) - poor or absent (Figure 4).

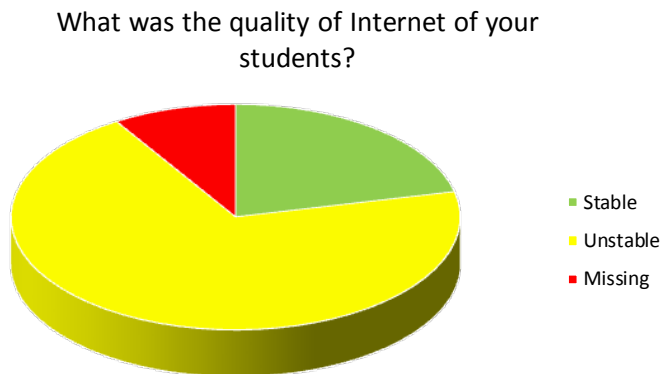


Fig. 4
Pupils have a stable internet connection

Answering the question “Were all your pupils able to join the learning process?”, only 17 respondents (30.4%) gave a positive answer. The majority of children in the class were able to continue their studies with 34 teachers (60.7%), the minority of pupils in the class - with 2 teachers (5.4%). 2 teachers noted that the children of her class could not continue their studies because of the occupation of the school premises by Russian troops (Fig. 5).

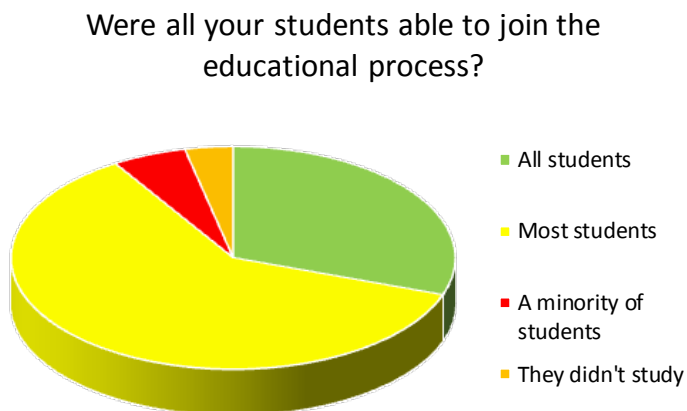


Fig.5
Pupils' coverage by educational process

The described situation gives grounds to conclude that the quality of educational services in wartime, due to objective circumstances, cannot be provided in full under the usual organizational structure, and therefore it is necessary to develop compensatory measures to ensure children's access to full-fledged education.

In general, 31 practitioners (55.3%) considered organizational conditions conditionally acceptable for pupils' learning. 18 participants (32.2%) described them as complicated and 4 participants (7%) – difficult (Fig. 6)¹.

Among the comments explaining the complications, we consider the following eloquent:
– “Two of my pupils worked from abroad in unusual conditions”;

¹ Hereinafter: there is no data from teachers who were in the occupied territory

- “There was Ukrainian communication and Internet in the village for some time. Then the occupiers cut it off”;
- “The pupils who remained in the occupied territory suffered from the lack of printed textbooks usual for first-graders”;
- “Moving and related organizational settings for studying and entering the educational process were difficult. Parents’ uncertainty about their own capabilities also had a negative impact on children. Their education was put on the agenda after solving household problems”.

In what organizational conditions did most students have to study?

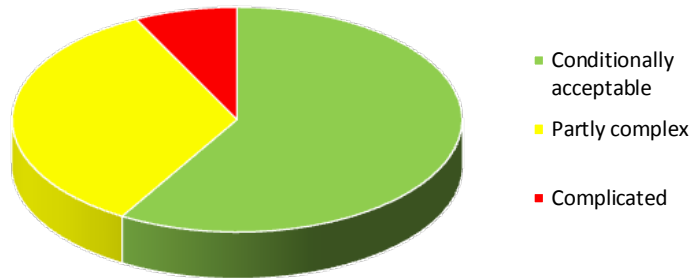


Fig. 6
Conditions in what the pupils studied

Teachers’ assessments of the organizational conditions and the opinions expressed reflect the complexity of the situation in which young children had to find themselves. Undoubtedly, this situation was not conducive to their learning and, consequently, had a negative impact not only on their academic achievements, but also on their psycho-emotional background and development in general.

The period of study before the war in our school was associated with distance learning due to the pandemic. Therefore, the distance learning format introduced from the beginning of the war in Ukraine was not new to the participants of the educational process. As for its features during the described period, 20 survey participants (35.7%) were able to implement synchronous distance learning; 30 participants (53.6%) combined synchronous and asynchronous learning. Most of the respondents noted that they used additional electronic services such as Google Meet, Viber, Zoom, Classroom, Wordwall, as well as digital educational platforms “Всесвіта”, “На урок”, “Іпросвіта” and others. Several teachers recorded their lessons on video and posted them on YouTube.

Characterizing the course of distance learning, 43 teachers (76.8%) were able to implement the educational process fully, as it is possible in the online format. 9 teachers (16%) conducted classes according to a shortened procedure, the rest of the teachers noted that their teaching was fragmented (Fig. 7). Teachers noted that their classes were often interrupted by air raids, which made pupils nervous and irritable.

As for the organization of teachers’ work, methodological support for the implementation of training systems in the form of various methodological manuals, developments (projects) of training sessions, didactic materials for textbooks, etc. is considered to be a reasonable achievement for our teachers. 47 respondents (84%) had access to such materials; 4 teachers (7%) noted that there were few methodological materials, and 2 (3.5%) respondents did not have such materials at all (Fig. 8).

However, given the level of professional training and work experience of the surveyed teachers, this factor cannot be considered influential for the proper organization of the

educational process, even in such a difficult period. Although the lack of auxiliary materials for teachers created some difficulties, in particular, increased their time spent on preparation for classes.

How were your lessons organized?

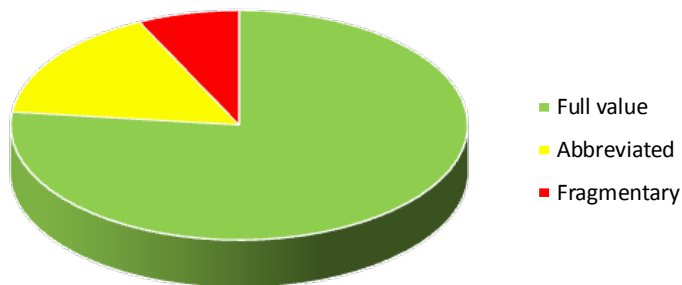


Fig. 7

The organisational patterns of the lessons

Did you have enough teaching materials?

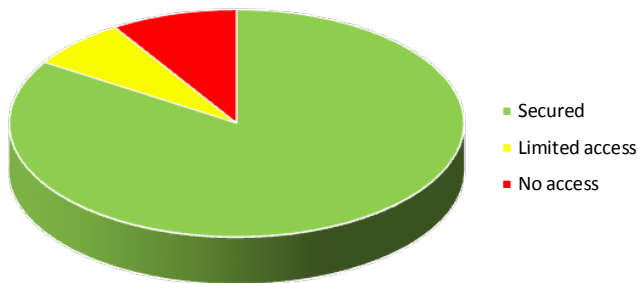


Fig. 8

Availability of teaching aids for teachers

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions follow from the above.

Primary education in Ukraine continued to function after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022. This was made possible by the Ukrainian government's creation in a short period of time of the foundations of institutional and legal regulation of the educational sphere for the period of martial law. This is in line with the principles of the international community on the importance of not interrupting education in war as an inalienable right of every child.

Teaching during the war is a completely new experience for the Ukrainian teachers. No university in Ukraine has ever provided such knowledge and skills before. And the fact that the teachers worked in such extremely difficult conditions demonstrates their high professionalism. In addition, this showed the high moral principles and civic position of the Ukrainian teachers who carried out their work in conditions that posed a danger to their health and life. Obviously, in this difficult time teachers need support. First of all, it is about the systemic policy on their psychological support. It is equally important to organize trainings for teachers to develop skills in providing psychological assistance to students and their parents. It also seems necessary the development of methodological support (guidelines for teaching in war conditions, adapted curricula and textbooks).

In the period after February 24, 2022 and the end of the 2021 – 2022 academic year the educational process took place in extremely difficult conditions. Depending on the region of Ukraine, the key challenges were: bombing, air raids and the need for children and teachers to stay and study in shelters; forced displacement of educational participants to safer places within Ukraine and abroad; damage to educational institutions due to bombing; lack of Internet or its poor quality; lack of educational materials. Teachers and pupils in the occupied territories were in an even worse situation, i.e. teachers were intimidated by the occupiers, their lives and health were under threat, and there was a ban on the use of the Ukrainian textbooks/training materials, lack of Internet. In fact, there has never been a completely safe place in Ukraine to conduct the educational process. This once again shows that war has terrible consequences, including in education. It takes away or restricts everyone's right to education, deteriorates the quality of the learning process, and limits children's future prospects due to the inability to fully get knowledge and develop competencies. In addition, war traumatizes children and teachers psychologically.

The experience of distance learning gained by teachers, students, and their parents during the COVID-19 pandemic has become an invaluable asset. Distance learning has become basic one under martial law. This experience has been further developed through the efforts of teachers in the new conditions (conducting classes remotely in shelters, working simultaneously with different gadgets; combining synchronous and asynchronous learning due to power outages, openness to use any educational electronic resources/services/digital platforms, including new ones that are available). This is about hundreds of successful cases of primary school classes in various wartime conditions that require further research. At the same time such aspects as the absence/instability of the Internet, the lack of technical means for learning seriously complicate the conduct of classes and actualize the development and implementation of a national/regional strategy and/or target programmes to support distance learning in Ukraine under martial law.

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