Contemporary Challenges for Higher Education Applicants in Ukraine: A Philosophical and Attitudinal Aspect

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Current socio-cultural conditions significantly influence the changes and transformations in Ukraine's education system. The value dimension of education states a decrease in all indicators affecting the quantitative aspects of education. The purpose of the article is to analyze the pedagogical (organizational, educational, methodological, and didactic) problems of Ukrainian education. The research methodology is based on general scientific, scientific–pedagogical, and philosophical methods to reveal qualitative indicators of higher education. Consequently, the current challenges of Ukraine's system of higher education require the accumulated efforts of all participants in the educational process (teachers, applicants, administrators) in order to overcome negative impacts on the quality of education.

Keywords: higher education, global challenges, educational process, philosophical aspect

INTRODUCTION

Scientific and pedagogical discourse emphasizes the potential risk of global threats to fundamental spheres of social activity (Moynihan, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian–Ukrainian war, and social as well as economic difficulties provoke moral exhaustion for Ukrainian people and society. Participants of the educational process feel the negative influence of socio-cultural phenomena in both practical–usual and moral–spiritual dimensions. One should admit that education applicants are most vulnerable to such negative manifestations precisely because they are usually young people who do not yet have significant experience in dealing with difficult situations in life. At the same time, the mechanisms of

self-preservation both in the individual and in the social dimension are actualized among applicants for higher education, which in turn provokes an activation in all spheres of public activity. Education is one of the key mechanisms for counteracting socio-cultural challenges.

Higher education is now seen not as exceptionalism but as one of the basic elements in societal functioning. The purpose of scientific research is to develop a clear understanding among higher education applicants of the goals of their education and the appropriate higher level of qualification in a particular field in an unstable milieu.

Education in the development of human civilization has evolved under many socio-historical conditions. Wars, pandemics, and natural and social cataclysms are all phenomena that have left behind destruction and suffering but could not stop the process of education. Education is value-oriented in its purpose; however, since the beginning of its existence it has acquired essential content. Fundamental cognitive activity in acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities is reflected in all manifestations of human existence. In education, "cognition" has acquired a peculiar meaning, combining several key moments (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
COGNITIVE POTENTIAL OF APPLICANTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

meaning-formative elements	the positioning of human education as one of the characteristics of its exclusivity and uniqueness
practical and everyday aspects	providing education with fundamental practice-oriented content
status of higher education	awareness of much higher opportunities for the implementation of their ideas in society

Source: authors' own development

METHODS

The methodology used to study the challenges for higher education applicants in Ukraine is based on general scientific and philosophical methodological resources. A system analysis is relevant for the study of aspects related to the state of education, which highlights the fundamental foundations of the national educational space. To strengthen the results, scientific–cognitive activity was used as the comparative analysis method.

Because scientific exploration faces the problems of education under instability, two fundamental philosophical methodologies were used: dialectics and synergetics. The synergetic methodology allows considering the challenges in education by means of self-organizing principles. Reflection, which is the result of awareness of the complex realities of Ukrainian society today, is extrapolated to all spheres of social activity. The educational sphere becomes one of the clusters where valuable educational constants are formed.

An innovative methodological approach is proposed by Hörberg et al. (2019), which is capable of overcoming the dialectical categorization of educational space. The interconnectedness of didactics and reflection in learning and educational are proposed as fundamental. In the conditions of permanent changes of the sociocultural space in Ukrainian education, such a methodological strategy is justified and relevant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In conducting a review of sources and literature on the challenges for higher education applicants in Ukraine, it should be noted that the topic has a rather specific presentation in scientific and pedagogical discourse.

Therefore, the main works that helped identify the characteristic features of educational problems of the Ukrainian student community focus on the potential and real threats that Ukraine is facing currently (above all, full-scale war and pandemic). Among these threats are the following:

- the reorientation of student-centered educational strategies toward societal concerns, with all the implications of this process for the educational space (World-Centered Education: A View for the Present, 2021);
- characterizing the perspectives of anthropological features of the higher education applicant (wisdom (Ardelt et al., 2018) and well-being (Sherman, 2020)), which were actualized after threats to modern Ukrainian education, science, culture, etc.;
- socio-cultural manifestations that fill the content of the concept of education in general (Bolmsjö et al., 2019) and the status of higher education (O'Donnell, 2018).

Challenges of a global and local nature are outlined in Miller (2022). To better understand the challenges for Ukrainian students under the conditions of Russian military aggression, one should use sources directly testifying to the risks arising during the military conflict (Education and War in Ukraine, February 24 - April 1, 2022).

The modern challenges facing the participants of the educational process require the streamlining of bibliographic databases (DBs). The role of databases in the crisis has increased significantly, as they are the main sources of metadata publications and bibliometric indicators (Bakhmat et al., 2022).

Global Challenges for Higher Education Applicants in Ukraine

Modern civilizational progress is causing a change in the purpose of the educational system as a whole. In recent years, the concepts of world-centered rather than person-centered education have been singular in the scientific paradigm (World-Centered Education: A View for the Present, 2021). In Ukraine, this issue is now practically outside the framework of humanitarian–scientific discourse. Granting values to the system of higher education is not an administrative or organizational method. It is a peculiar reaction of the subjects of the educational process to stimuli characteristic of Ukrainian society. Students and teachers are united as never before by a common understanding and appreciation of the importance of providing the educational process. The preservation of educational space is an important mission for Ukrainian society. Consequently, the purpose of education determines its practical goals in today's pragmatic world. Traditional sustainable management of natural resources while ensuring environmental development (Koval et al., 2021) is not effective for intellectual resources.

One of the value constants actualized in the educational space under conditions of instability is the concept of perspectives for applicants that are opened for them during the educational process. This concept is directly related to the human-dimensional and value clusters of the educational process, which focus more on knowledge or intelligence. It is noted that those who have received or are receiving higher education are more inclined to learn and motivated to acquire new knowledge and skills throughout life. Thus, a strategy for the perspective of higher education and qualifications is developing, including:

- the actualization of intrapersonal and interpersonal communication elements as educational skills;
- the awareness and formation of the final boundaries of qualification (both for education in general and for the applicant in particular);
- the systemic role of higher education in reconciling the multidirectional characteristics of human nature;
- the adaptive purpose of education as a mechanism for responding to the unpredictability and uncertainty of life.

The acquisition of educational qualifications is a kind of indicator of personal growth and is the result of the integration of the applicant into the higher education system. The higher education system is structured in such a way that a person is constantly required to apply self-examination, self-awareness, and self-understanding (Ardelt, Stephen Pridgen, & Nutter-Pridgen, 2018). Such reflexivity shapes the educated person's (appropriate level) response to the challenges facing the individual and society in real time. Thus,

higher education applicants form a kind of fused world view to avoid despair and discouragement in the difficult conditions of instability in Ukraine.

Force majeure circumstances usually exacerbate traditional problems in education. Consequently, the principles of self-understanding and self-reflection in higher education aspirants are actualized, which emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the adaptation of this knowledge to socio-cultural conditions. Self-awareness allows the clear articulation of not only the perception of the educational resource but also the ideological foundations of civic position. Self-assessment forms a stimulating effect of self-organization, which is an important component of the higher education applicant's response to socio-cultural challenges.

Pedagogical Challenges of the Higher Education System in Ukraine (Educational, Methodological, and Didactic Aspects)

The system of higher education must be balanced in the ratio of traditionality and innovation. The teaching and methodological arsenal and the didactic dimension of higher education are the basis for a practically oriented cluster of the educational process. Higher education is undergoing a transformation like other segments of social activity. The organization of the educational process in today's educational space is changing both in its substantive manifestation and in the format of educational activity.

When we consider the content elements of higher education, we point to the transformation of the understanding of the teaching–methodological component (Sanetra & Małodobry, 2022). Methodology or teaching principles do not undergo significant changes as they are fundamental elements of education. However, we state a cardinal change in the presentation and distribution of these components of the educational process.

The total informatization and technologization of the education system has led to the transformation of teaching and learning materials into the concept of teaching and learning content. Such positioning is more understandable and demanded by participants of higher education institutions in Ukraine. Innovative processes of educational and methodological character have the following manifestations in the modern Ukrainian system of higher education:

- dynamism (evolution of educational–methodical information, assignment to formation of professional competencies of soft-skills principles);
- intensity (translation and distribution of educational–methodical content in accordance with the increasing capabilities of ICTs, and the needs of participants in the educational process);
- criticism (diversity of information flows generates the need to check their relevance);
- mobility (multi-disciplinarity and principles of self-organization of participants in the educational process).

A critical challenge for the Ukrainian system of higher education has been the process of organizing the educational process. Pandemic restrictions and military aggression have led to the transition to an electronic digital distance learning format. This has revealed critical threats to education quality indicators. ICT elements ensure the principle of continuity of education. At the same time, there is a problem with the adaptation of participants of the educational process to the new realities while meeting the requirements of forming professional competencies of higher education applicants and the teacher's ability to implement pedagogical activity.

The Influence of Socio-Cultural Threats on the Formation of Competencies of Higher Education Applicants in Ukraine

The education paradox is that hard and soft skills acquired during higher education form doubts about certain aspects of social norms. Under normal circumstances, one usually adapts to generally accepted societal norms. However, against the background of threats to humanistic principles, certain normative elements are leveled and undergo changes. One indication among applicants for higher education is a shift from an adaptive style of thinking to a goal-oriented format. This is how a person develops in the context of adaptation to new socio-cultural realities. A person with higher education is more susceptible to the

formation of a personal strong position, which is based not only on the psycho-emotional factor but also on the mental–intellectual level.

One of the challenges for today's higher education system is the preservation of well-being principles (Sherman, 2020). Over the centuries, an understanding has developed of the relationship between education and well-being. This stereotype refers to both the pragmatic value factor related to the issue of material well-being and the spiritual value aspect. People who received higher education had potentially all opportunities to realize their potential. Nowadays, the concept of well-being in higher education institutions is more focused on personal well-being in its various manifestations. At the same time, higher education often contributes to the study of values that form the consciousness of a citizen, for whom the values of their nation and their people are important.

Recently the national scientific and pedagogical discourse on education has been marked by a reorientation from socio-political issues to the problem of the individual. For a long time, political, social, economic, and educational reforms have been actively promoted in the Ukrainian educational space. The introduction of information and digital technologies in education has become a real mainstream of educational policy. Gradually, however, support for individual freedom within the educational space has become a priority. Such precepts provide a new awareness of the role and importance of each subject of educational activity. Note that today's dimensions of individual freedom lack the radical ambiguity (Miller, 2022) that characterized the period of the philosophical–anthropological renaissance of the twentieth century. Now, one deals with a synergetic model of higher education development, which implies a combination of the concepts of freedom and pragmatism (see Fig. 1).

FIGURE 1
MODERN SYNERGETIC MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUBJECT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
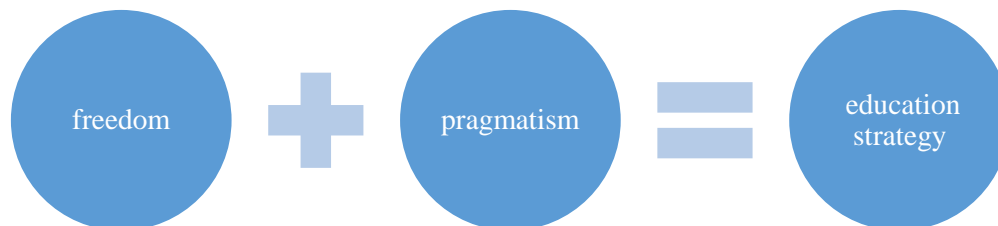
Source: authors' own development

In the practically oriented dimension, synergetics forms the balance necessary for the effective functioning of a higher education system at the national level. This positioning of the individual components of the applicant (freedom) and the public orientation of the educational space (pragmatism) achieves a flexible protective model that responds to emerging threats.

Consequently, today there is a tendency to move away from the total anthropologization and axiologization of the education system. Of course, globalization trends and information and communication technologies have been playing up to the value-based, human-centered aspects of the worldview system because they have focused on the human being. However, the COVID-19 pandemic became a global crisis and the full-scale military aggression in Ukraine became a local but very powerful factor in the return to the essential dimensions in the Ukrainian system of higher education. The applicant for higher education, in addition to practical educational and methodological factors, takes into account socio-cultural risks primarily related to security. Under instability, not only the intellectual component but also the physical development factor becomes important. In particular, the introduction of forms and methods of education aimed at the formation of the principles of maintaining a healthy lifestyle to improve the level of physical fitness of students is actualized (Shkola et al., 2022).

Educational strategies are a model of development based on many factors (Sanetra & Małodobry, 2022).

The peculiarity of constructing an educational strategy is to take into account the current factors that determine the pace and characteristics of the development of the educational process. At the same time, educational strategy provides adaptation to socio-historical conditions and offers ways out of crisis phenomena.

The processes of globalization as well as global society formation are characterized by a new understanding of the educational system (Sudarsana, Sutriyanti, Asli, Selasih, & Astawa, 2020). Nowadays, the information component allows the use of information with almost unlimited access. This leads to new innovative strategies in higher education and promotes education flexibility and dynamism. It is these concepts that have become very important factors in confronting the Ukrainian education system with modern threats. It is information that fuels the potential of the individual, providing the opportunity to analyze independently and draw appropriate conclusions. Applicants for higher education are acquainted with methodological paradigms from their first year of study. Therefore, the analysis–conclusion algorithm is not something unknown to a higher education applicant (Prokopenko, 2021).

This format of thinking concentrates precisely on the formation of strategic (but not abstract) elements. Educational ideas have two threats to their existence: theoretical and physical (Verharen, 2020). In this context, one should not ignore the positioning of education, science, and culture on a civilizational scale because it is socio-cultural threats along with natural cataclysms that are the real challenges that require a proper response and the development of methods to counter their negative impact (Sears, 2021).

Ways to Respond to Modern Threats to the Higher Education System

Throughout its historical development, human civilization has experienced many complex socio-cultural crises accompanied by global changes (Krumsvik, 2020). Ukrainian society is experiencing events of a large-scale nature, which carry quite a lot of threats to human life and health. Public consciousness is also changing and it is difficult to imagine an area of society that would not be affected by the consequences of military actions or pandemics. Consequently, education also experiences the destructive influence of external factor. Historically, however, education systems are flexible and adapt quickly to threats. Modern education is "armed" informationally, technologically, and, most importantly, motivationally.

The task of education is to encourage participants of the educational space to search for opportunities in the most difficult conditions, which is an indispensable indicator of the indestructibility of society and the state, and the ability for further development.

With the gradual, measured development of society, there is a certain depreciation of the importance of the educational system. Biesta (2019) notes that students and faculty too often indicate that they are gradually losing awareness of the importance of higher education. This reflection indicates that society is highly organized but, at the same time, hides threats of over-conservatizing education. The situation in the system of higher education in Ukraine in the face of current threats is unique for the study of educational measurement. There is an opportunity to conduct research that will study both the problems of the functioning of education under martial law and the formation of students' worldview priorities during the war.

Based on a synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical perspectives, Ribers, Balslev, and Jensen (2021) proposed a scheme of interchangeable dynamics between subjective experience and dialogic learning, consisting of several dimensions of practical wisdom:
- existential–phenomenological dimension;
- the dimension of relational competence;
- the social dimension of learning.

An applicant for higher education can appear as a victim of *force majeure* and try to avoid these conditions. Or they can identify the opportunity to adapt and continue their educational development in the new difficult conditions. Modern democratic societies allow citizens the right to choose. Note that the continuation of the educational process in most higher education institutions in Ukraine (distance learning, the evacuation of universities from the occupied territories (Education and War in Ukraine)) confirms that the vast majority of applicants for higher education in Ukraine chose to continue their educational

development rather than stop learning. Moreover, the informational and research activity of degree candidates has not decreased due to achievements in the digital transformation of science and education (Leshchenko et al., 2021).

The realities of today's civilization development dictate the development conditions for all spheres of public activity. Scientific and technological progress, information and communication space, and the processes of globalization create the preconditions for the formation of pragmatic educational policy all focus on efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, there are some aspects of the educational environment that are somewhat overshadowed by powerful globalization trends but have steady signs of relevance. In particular, O'Donnell (2018) points to the precognitive sensibilities of educational aspirants that shape their notion of educational experience. Among the main manifestations of educational experience are the following:

- the urge to understand or master new things;
- surprises that arise when learning something;
- ways and means of acquiring knowledge.

This is how the educational space is reoriented from axiological target moments to a balanced essence understanding of the purpose of higher education. The implementation of program goals of education is carried out not by the statement of results but by the formation of educational experience.

An important problem of contemporary socio-cultural space that influenced applicants for higher education was the feeling of loneliness (Bolmsjö, Tengland, & Rämgård, 2018) when a person did not experience proper support in society. In education, such loneliness was expressed by the inability to realize one's educational potential, which reduced the role of higher education. In Ukraine, manifestations of loneliness caused an outflow of qualified scientists abroad (Oliinyk et al., 2021).

Force majeure has a phenomenal rallying effect, uniting people in the face of threat. Consequently, the system of higher education in Ukraine feels a powerful trends toward unity. The educational and scientific communities are united against a serious threat that impends the existence of statehood.

Interaction at the teacher–student level under customary conditions has an axiological basis and is based on normative and ethical principles (Brady, 2019). Under conditions of threats and instability, these concepts are added to the essence manifestations, which are expressed in the idealization of the educational community (Biesta, 2021).

Modern challenges facing Ukrainian society have become a kind of catalyst for transformation of the education system. Applicants for higher education in a very short time are aware of the value in a new, aggravated understanding. The value of life, the transience of events, lack of stability, and, in some places, a complete imbalance—these are the new realities facing participants of the educational process in Ukraine. Consequently, values undergo drastic changes and cease to be at the top of the semantic concepts of educational strategies. However, the place at the top of human awareness is taken by existential issues.

CONCLUSION

The pedagogical paradigm is formed depending on the socio-cultural conditions where society finds itself. The Ukrainian system of higher education has already partially adapted to modern threats (pandemic, war, socio-economic problems) in logistical and organizational terms. However, the main transformation at present is the mental perception of war by higher education applicants.

The activity of higher education applicants under conditions of instability includes many elements that relate specifically to the educational space. Security, socio-economic, and psychological threats affect all spheres of social life and fundamentally change the traditional arrangement of the higher education aspirant in both professional and subject-matter dimensions. Under the conditions of instability, value norms become more profound, moving away from the traditionally measured orientation. Participants of the educational process are deprived of much of the benefits of the modern educational system such as:

- the ability to use without restrictions the educational potential due to security threats associated with pandemic restrictions and martial law;
- the ability to implement people's own developments to improve cognitive activity;

- socio-cultural losses and threats that limit the development of education in general.

Education is a stabilizing cluster of social life. At a time when there is a catastrophe of a humanitarian, economic, and social nature, the axiological components of public consciousness are in decline. These components are a necessary factor that can maintain the integrity and vitality of society. Beneath the educational space, the issue of the quality of education is replaced by the target component of the educational process. With an awareness of the importance of acquiring professional skills, it is much more effective to organize the learning process, even in an unstable environment.

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