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## ENSURING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY UNDER ARMED CONFLICT: THE UNDERGROUND UNIVERSITY MODEL IN UKRAINE

ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ БЕЗПЕРЕРВНОСТІ ОСВИТИ В УМОВАХ ЗБРОЙНОГО  
КОНФЛІКТУ: МОДЕЛЬ ПІДЗЕМНОГО УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ В УКРАЇНІ

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### ABSTRACT

*Russia's prolonged full-scale war against Ukraine has triggered profound social and humanitarian crises, including the systematic degradation of the educational environment, which directly threatens the intellectual development and future prospects of Ukraine's youth and makes timely, adaptive educational interventions critically necessary.*

**The purpose** of this research is to investigate how Ukrainian higher education institutions, specifically Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, are adapting to the exigencies of ongoing armed conflict through the implementation of underground, shelter-based educational practices.

**Methodology.** In order to examine the transformation of educational practices under conditions of armed conflict this research employed a mixed-methods case study, combining the empirical basis (for investigating the emergence of the "Underground University"), descriptive statistical methods (to identify trends in student participation and preferences across different modes of instruction) and qualitative thematic analysis (to identify recurring themes related to safety, accessibility, educational continuity, psycho-emotional well-being, and student engagement).

**Results.** Over three years of full-scale war, Ukrainian higher education institutions have developed adaptive educational models shaped by regional security conditions. Instructional formats range

*Тривала повномасштабна війна Росії проти України спричинила глибокі соціальні та гуманітарні кризи, включаючи систематичну деградацію освітнього середовища, що безпосередньо загрожує інтелектуальному розвитку та майбутнім перспективам української молоді та робить своєчасні адаптивні освітні втручання критично необхідними.*

**Метою** цього дослідження є вивчення того, як українські заклади вищої освіти, зокрема Національний юридичний університет імені Ярослава Мудрого, адаптуються до вимог триваючого збройного конфлікту шляхом реорганізації підвальних приміщень на бомбосховища, де впроваджуються освітні практики.

**Методи.** Для вивчення трансформації освітніх практик в умовах збройного конфлікту в цьому дослідженні було використано тематичне дослідження зі змішаними методами, що поєднує емпіричну основу (для дослідження виникнення «Підземного університету»), описові статистичні методи (для виявлення тенденцій участі студентів у різних форматах навчання та їхніх уподобань) та якісний тематичний аналіз (для виявлення повторюваних тем, пов'язаних з безпекою, доступністю, безперервністю освіти, психоемоційним благополуччям та залученням студентів).

**Результати.** Протягом трьох років повномасштабної війни українські заклади вищої освіти розробили адаптивні освітні моделі, сформовані відповідно до регіональних умов безпеки. Формати навчання варіюються від повністю дистанційного навчання поблизу

from fully distance learning near active hostilities to blended and on-site delivery in safer areas. At Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, underground facilities were converted into fully equipped bomb-shelter classrooms to ensure continuity and safety. Student choice data reveal fluctuating preferences between distance and blended learning, followed by renewed demand for on-site instruction. This shelter-based approach sustained educational quality, engagement, and psychological well-being under ongoing armed conflict.

**Conclusions.** This study demonstrates that the Underground University model enables higher education institutions to sustain academic continuity, safety, and quality under armed conflict. By integrating underground learning spaces with blended pedagogies and experiential practices, Ukrainian universities foster resilience, psychological stability, and meaningful educational engagement, offering a sustainable model for higher education in crisis contexts.

**Keywords:** blended learning, model for higher education, university, Ukraine, war.

активних бойових дій до змішаного та очного навчання в безпечніших районах. У Національному юридичному університеті імені Ярослава Мудрого підземні приміщення були переобладнані на повністю обладнані аудиторії-бомбосховища для забезпечення безперервності навчання та безпеки. Дані про вибір студентів свідчать про коливання уподобань між дистанційним та змішаним навчанням, а потім про відновлення попиту на очне навчання. Цей підхід, заснований на використанні укриттів, забезпечив збереження якості освіти, залученості учасників освітнього процесу та психологічного благополуччя в умовах триваючого збройного конфлікту.

**Висновки.** Це дослідження демонструє, що модель «Підземного університету» дозволяє вищим навчальним закладам підтримувати академічну безперервність, безпеку та якість в умовах збройного конфлікту. Інтегруючи підземні навчальні простори зі змішаними педагогічними методами та емпіричними практиками, українські університети сприяють стійкості, психологічній стабільності та змістовній освітній залученості, пропонуючи сталу модель вищої освіти в кризових умовах.

**Ключові слова:** змішане навчання, модель вищої освіти, університет, Україна, війна.

## INTRODUCTION

Russia's prolonged and full-scale war against Ukraine has precipitated a cascade of profound social and humanitarian crises. The deliberate targeting of educational institutions within conflict zones (spaces historically recognized as centres of intellectual, cultural, and civic development) has resulted in widespread infrastructural destruction and the near-complete disruption of conventional pedagogical practices. The systematic degradation of the educational environment poses a direct threat to the intellectual development and future prospects of Ukraine's youth, rendering timely and adaptive educational interventions critically necessary.

The extensive destruction of educational infrastructure (Figure 1), together with the forced displacement of students and academic staff, has generated an acute educational emergency. Beyond material losses, the psychological consequences of sustained warfare have significantly undermined learners' cognitive engagement, emotional stability, and capacity for sustained academic work.

These conditions necessitate a comprehensive and integrated approach to education that simultaneously addresses academic continuity and psycho-emotional well-being. In response to these challenges, Kharkiv that formerly was one of Ukraine's major academic centres has emerged as a testing ground for innovative educational practices aimed at preserving learning under extreme conditions.

**Figure 1**

*H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University after Russian attack (07.2022)*



**Note.** Authors' own resource.

The persistence of armed hostilities has compelled a fundamental reconfiguration of educational delivery, requiring the adoption of pedagogical models capable of functioning within the severe constraints of wartime reality. Traditional forms of face-to-face instruction have become largely untenable in areas exposed to regular shelling, necessitating the exploration of alternative learning modalities that reconcile instructional quality with safety imperatives.

Within this context, the protection of students' and educators' physical safety and psychological well-being has become the primary organizing principle of educational policy and practice. This imperative has catalysed the development of non-standard solutions, including the creation of underground learning environments within bomb shelters (Kostikova et al., 2025) and the implementation of blended and hybrid instructional formats. Accordingly, the adaptive restructuring of higher education systems under conditions of persistent threat is not merely a temporary measure but a prerequisite for institutional survival and educational continuity.

Against this backdrop of unprecedented disruption, the present study addresses a central and urgent research question: How can the fundamental requirements of participant safety, psycho-emotional well-being, and high-quality educational provision be effectively integrated and sustained in conditions of protracted armed conflict? This question extends beyond theoretical inquiry, representing a practical and ethical challenge directly linked to the preservation of a nation's intellectual capital.

To address this issue, the article presents a detailed case-based analysis of the experience of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University (Kharkiv), focusing on its innovative adaptation of teaching and learning processes within bomb-shelter environments. These cases provide empirical insight into the practical realization of the

right to education under conditions of elevated risk, enabling an examination of how institutional, pedagogical, and psychological dimensions interact in crisis-responsive educational models. Specifically, the analysis considers organizational and logistical arrangements, instructional strategies, and psycho-emotional support mechanisms that underpin these adaptive practices.

By critically examining these pioneering responses, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how higher education institutions can sustain academic continuity, student engagement, and institutional integrity under conditions of armed conflict. Ultimately, this research documents and analyses the adaptive capacity and resilience of the Ukrainian higher education system, offering analytically grounded insights that may inform educational policy and practice in other regions confronting comparable crisis conditions.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has foregrounded the urgent necessity to critically reassess and adapt educational practices under conditions of armed conflict. Accordingly, this literature review synthesizes key scholarly contributions addressing education in crisis contexts, with particular emphasis on the challenges, transformations, and adaptive strategies necessitated by prolonged warfare. The review situates the Ukrainian experience within broader historical, sociological, and institutional perspectives on education in conflict-affected environments.

An examination of the historical dimensions of education in contexts of conflict provides an essential analytical foundation for the present study. Burton (2020) offers a historically grounded analysis of African students' pursuit of higher education under colonial rule, demonstrating how systemic violence, displacement, and the denial of educational access fostered alternative and often precarious pathways to knowledge acquisition. This historical perspective establishes a conceptual framework for understanding educational resilience, which is particularly instructive for analysing the endurance and adaptive capacity of Ukrainian higher education under contemporary wartime conditions.

In recent years, a rapidly expanding body of scholarship has emerged in direct response to the Ukrainian context. Within this growing corpus, several studies focus on the immediate and medium-term challenges of sustaining educational processes during wartime. Marchenko (2023), Fiialka and Kornieva (2024), and Zhyhora et al. (2024) document the systemic disruption of education following the onset of hostilities and the subsequent institutional shift toward emergency and digitally mediated learning formats.

Specifically, Marchenko (2023) analyses the initial collapse and rapid reconfiguration of university operations, emphasizing the imperative of preserving institutional structure, academic staff, and scientific potential. Fiialka and Kornieva (2024) underscore the importance of safety training, ethical responsibility, and the cultivation of psychological resilience among students. Zhyhora et al. (2024), in turn, examine the deployment of technological solutions, including video conferencing tools, mobile applications, and learning management systems, as mechanisms for ensuring instructional continuity. Collectively, these studies highlight the immediacy and pragmatism of the adaptive responses implemented by Ukrainian educators and students.

Complementing these institution-focused analyses, Torlone and Ishchenko (2024) investigate students' autonomous learning strategies during wartime, emphasizing the role of peer support networks and informal learning communities. While their work

primarily addresses individual-level learning processes, it implicitly reinforces the significance of institutional frameworks in facilitating self-directed learning, social cohesion, and psychological endurance under crisis conditions.

Beyond conceptual and sociological approaches, recent empirical research provides detailed insight into the operational functioning of Ukrainian universities under direct wartime pressure. Bugrov et al. (2023) present a case study of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv as an institution operating in immediate proximity to active hostilities, documenting administrative restructuring, psychological support mechanisms, and infrastructural adaptations designed to sustain educational activities.

Similarly, Greshta et al. (2023) identify core systemic challenges confronting higher education institutions during the war, including staff displacement, infrastructural destruction, and disruptions to governance. Importantly, these authors propose institutional-level responses and policy-relevant solutions applicable to the national higher education system.

Further contributions address the experiences of universities affected by forced relocation and displacement. Orzhel et al. (2023) analyse development models for displaced Ukrainian universities, focusing on strategies that support institutional continuity and long-term recovery. Broader analytical overviews by Ugryn et al. (2023) and Tsybuliak et al. (2023) document a spectrum of adaptive practices, including trauma-informed pedagogy, temporary relocation, crisis governance, and risk management. Zayachuk (2025) draws attention to the war-induced challenges facing quality assurance mechanisms in higher education. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that, despite unprecedented constraints, Ukrainian universities continue to fulfil their core educational missions during wartime.

Nevertheless, a critical synthesis of the existing literature reveals a significant analytical gap. While current research extensively addresses digitalization, institutional resilience, psychological support, and emergency governance, it does not specifically examine the pedagogical, organizational, and psycho-emotional dimensions of teaching and learning conducted within bomb shelters as dedicated educational spaces. This lacuna underscores the originality and relevance of the present study.

Accordingly, the **purpose** of this research is to investigate how Ukrainian higher education institutions, specifically Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, are adapting to the exigencies of ongoing armed conflict through the implementation of underground, shelter-based educational practices. By focusing on this emergent and underexplored educational format, the study contributes novel empirical and analytical insights into crisis-responsive higher education in conflict settings.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to examine the transformation of educational practices under conditions of armed conflict. The case of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University was selected as a representative example of a Ukrainian higher education institution adapting to prolonged wartime constraints through the implementation of underground and blended learning environments. The case study approach enabled an in-depth analysis of institutional responses, student preferences, and pedagogical practices within a real-life context of high uncertainty and risk.

The research was conducted during the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine, when higher education institutions were forced to operate under constant security threats, including air raids and infrastructure damage. In response, Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University reorganised parts of its physical infrastructure by converting certified bomb shelters into equipped classrooms and simultaneously expanded online and blended learning formats. These conditions formed the empirical basis for investigating the emergence of the “Underground University” as a new educational practice in conflict settings.

Data were collected using multiple complementary sources to ensure methodological triangulation. These included: 1) institutional documents and internal reports related to the organisation of the educational process during wartime; 2) aggregated statistical data on student participation and preferences for online, blended, and on-site learning formats across consecutive academic years; 3) observations of teaching and learning practices conducted in underground classrooms and hybrid environments; 4) analytical review of relevant national and international scholarly literature addressing higher education in crisis and conflict contexts. All data were analysed in anonymised and aggregated form, ensuring ethical compliance and the protection of participants.

The analysis combined descriptive statistical methods and qualitative thematic analysis. Quantitative data were used to identify trends in student participation and preferences across different modes of instruction. Qualitative data were analysed inductively to identify recurring themes related to safety, accessibility, educational continuity, psycho-emotional well-being, and student engagement. Comparative analysis was applied to contextualise the findings within existing research on wartime education, distance learning, and institutional resilience. This allowed the identification of both shared challenges and distinctive features of the Underground University model.

The study adhered to established ethical standards for educational research conducted in emergency contexts. No personal or sensitive data were collected. Participation in surveys and observations was voluntary, and all findings are reported at an institutional level. Given the security situation, particular attention was paid to avoiding the disclosure of information that could pose risks to students, staff, or facilities.

While the case study design allows for in-depth analysis, the findings are context-specific and may not be directly generalisable to all higher education systems affected by conflict. Nevertheless, the study offers analytical generalisation by identifying practices and principles that may be transferable to other institutions operating under similar conditions.

## RESULTS

Over a period exceeding three years, the Ukrainian educational community has been engaged in a complex, iterative process of identifying, testing, and implementing pedagogical solutions capable of functioning under conditions of full-scale war. Within this national context of crisis and resistance, significant regional disparities have emerged in the organization and delivery of higher education, primarily determined by geographical proximity to zones of active military hostilities.

Ukraine’s vast territorial expanse (603,628 square kilometres) renders these disparities particularly pronounced, as approximately 20% of the country’s eastern and southern regions remain under temporary occupation and subject to continuous military

confrontation. These conditions have compelled higher education institutions to adopt highly adaptive and context-sensitive educational strategies.

Higher education institutions located in occupied or frontline regions were forced to relocate to comparatively safer western areas of the country, where instruction could be resumed either in conventional classroom environments or through blended learning formats. In contrast, universities situated in close proximity to active hostilities transitioned entirely to distance learning modalities, prioritizing the physical safety of students and academic staff. While this shift was essential, it simultaneously introduced challenges related to educational quality, student engagement, and the preservation of academic community.

In August 2022, the State Service for Quality of Education in Ukraine conducted a large-scale anonymous online survey targeting educators, researchers, and students across higher education and vocational institutions. The survey aimed to assess the readiness of educational stakeholders for various instructional delivery formats during the 2022/23 academic year. With approximately 24,000 respondents, the survey provides statistically robust and representative insights into national educational trends, with results officially disseminated through governmental channels.

Among respondents affiliated with higher education institutions (69.4% of the total sample), a substantial proportion expressed readiness to resume face-to-face instruction. Approximately 10% reported that their institutions planned to initiate the academic year in a fully classroom-based format. However, the predominant institutional response involved the adoption of blended learning models, combining alternating periods of on-site and distance instruction (Huszti et al., 2024). This approach reflects an attempt to reconcile safety imperatives with pedagogical effectiveness.

Despite the recognized advantages of distance learning for ensuring safety, both students and academic staff consistently expressed a preference for in-person educational interaction, citing its role in maintaining academic stability, instructional quality, and meaningful engagement. Consequently, municipal authorities and university administrations in Kharkiv began actively exploring safe modalities for resuming on-site education. It is also widely acknowledged that online education is often perceived as less effective than traditional classroom-based instruction, particularly in disciplines requiring active interaction and applied learning.

As a result, during the summer of 2023, several higher education institutions in Kharkiv (located approximately 200 km from active combat zones) initiated the transformation of extensive subterranean facilities into fully equipped bomb shelters with classroom functionality. This strategic preparation enabled institutions to offer students an option for on-site instruction during the 2023/24 academic year under enhanced safety conditions.

At Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, which possesses large multi-level underground spaces, these facilities were comprehensively adapted into dual-purpose classrooms and bomb shelters, equipped with ventilation systems, sanitary facilities, potable water supplies, electrical generators, public address systems, fire alarms, and multiple emergency exits (Figures 2a and Figures 2b). This infrastructural transformation represents a tangible institutional response aimed at sustaining educational continuity while prioritizing safety.

**Figure 2**

*Educational space of the underground university bomb shelter*



**(a)** Bomb shelter for students



**(b)** Classroom in the bomb shelter

**Note.** Authors' own resource.

In addition, student dormitories at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University were similarly equipped with bomb shelters (Figure 3), demonstrating a comprehensive approach to student welfare that extends beyond instructional spaces.

**Figure 3**

*Sleeping facilities in a bomb shelter (authors' own resource)*



**Note.** Authors' own resource

During the 2023/24 academic year, students were afforded the opportunity to select the educational format most compatible with their psychological comfort and individual circumstances. Consequently, 51% of first-year students opted for fully remote instruction, while 49% selected a blended learning format, combining online lectures with on-site seminars and practical classes (Holubnycha et al., 2024).

This organizational decision was shaped by several constraints and pedagogical considerations. First, underground facilities lack sufficient capacity to host large lecture halls. Second, while live lectures enhance engagement, on-site participation is pedagogically more critical for seminars and practical classes, where immediate feedback, visibility, interaction, and hands-on activities are essential. Accordingly, underground spaces were primarily reconstructed to accommodate seminar and practical classrooms.

Initially, subterranean classrooms were intended for temporary use during air raid alerts. However, the extremely short missile flight time from the Belgorod region (approximately 40 seconds) often results in explosions occurring before warning sirens are activated. Moreover, the high frequency of alerts in Kharkiv necessitated repeated relocations, often every double period, which proved pedagogically inefficient. These relocations resulted in instructional time loss, decreased student concentration, and emerging disciplinary challenges. Consequently, the university administration adopted a strategic decision to conduct all on-site educational activities exclusively within subterranean classrooms.

In the 2024/25 academic year, 53% of first-year students selected fully remote learning, while 47% opted for blended instruction, indicating persistent safety concerns and student displacement. However, in the 2025/26 academic year, this trend reversed: 54% of first-year students chose on-campus learning in bomb-shelter classrooms, while 46% continued online education. This shift likely reflects cumulative fatigue from prolonged wartime restrictions and a renewed desire for academic normalcy and social interaction.

For academic staff, this hybrid educational arrangement provided a unique opportunity to comparatively evaluate distance and on-site teaching modalities, yielding practical insights into pedagogical effectiveness under crisis conditions.

Currently, higher education in Kharkiv operates through a diversified educational ecosystem, encompassing on-site instruction in bomb-shelter classrooms and synchronous distance learning via platforms such as Zoom, with explicit attention to students' psychological well-being. Teaching practices integrate traditional pedagogical methods (printed texts, blackboard instruction, audiovisual materials) alongside innovative approaches, including gamified learning (Kostikova et al., 2019; Soloshenko-Zadniprovska, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025), interactive whiteboards, and mobile learning technologies (Holubnycha et al., 2022).

One of the most distinctive pedagogical innovations implemented during wartime is the systematic integration of educational excursions. Unlike conventional practices, these excursions constitute a mandatory and weekly component of the curriculum. Students regularly visit forensic laboratories, museums of Forensics, prosecutor's offices, courts, and executive institutions in Kharkiv and Kyiv, including the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and many others (Figures 4 and 5).

**Figure 4***University Students' Educational Visit***(a)** Museum of Forensics**(b)** Visit at the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

**Note.** Authors' own resource

Under wartime conditions, educational excursions demonstrate enhanced pedagogical value, fulfilling multiple interrelated functions:

- *Instructional function*: facilitating contextualized, experiential learning that strengthens comprehension, retention, and academic motivation;
- *Stabilizing function*: serving a compensatory and restorative role within disrupted learning environments;
- *Cognitive engagement function*: reducing cognitive fatigue through experiential variation;
- *Psychological well-being function*: mitigating anxiety, restoring a sense of continuity, and supporting emotional resilience;
- *Social connectedness function*: fostering peer interaction, group cohesion, collaborative skills, and civic and professional identity formation.

The integration of these multifaceted pedagogical strategies within underground educational spaces exemplifies a novel and resilient model of higher education practice in conflict settings, underscoring the adaptability, innovation, and commitment of Ukrainian educators to sustaining meaningful learning under extreme conditions.

**DISCUSSION**

This study examined how Ukrainian higher education institutions, using Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University as a focal case, are responding to the unprecedented challenges

posed by full-scale war, with particular attention to the emergence of the “Underground University” as a novel educational practice in conflict settings. The findings demonstrate a complex interplay of institutional resilience, pedagogical adaptation, and strategic innovation, underscoring a sustained commitment to educational continuity under conditions of persistent physical threat and psychological strain.

The results align with and extend existing scholarship on wartime higher education in Ukraine, particularly research addressing the limitations and risks associated with distance learning. Galynska and Bilous (2022) identify accessibility, effectiveness, and safety as central challenges of wartime online education.

Our findings corroborate these concerns, as evidenced by the continued preference of a substantial proportion of students for fully online learning despite the availability of on-site instruction. At the same time, this study advances the discussion by demonstrating how blended and underground learning formats function not merely as stopgap solutions, but as structurally integrated pedagogical models designed to reconcile safety, accessibility, and instructional quality. The adaptive strategies employed by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University illustrate an institutional effort to uphold educational equity across diverse student circumstances, thereby reinforcing the concept of education as a protected social right even under conditions of armed conflict.

In a broader disciplinary context, Sokol and Melko (2022) emphasize the risks of student outflow and intellectual capital loss caused by prolonged reliance on distance education. The Underground University model can be interpreted as a counter-strategy to this trend, providing students with a tangible, physically grounded academic experience within Ukraine. By enabling safe in-person engagement, underground classrooms reinforce students’ attachment to national institutions and reduce the centrifugal pull of foreign educational systems. Furthermore, the university’s integration of digital technologies and innovative teaching methods resonates with calls for pedagogical modernization articulated in the literature on crisis education.

Zayachuk (2024) situates wartime higher education within a legal and institutional framework marked by infrastructural destruction and systemic risk. The transformation of bomb shelters into permanent learning environments directly addresses these structural vulnerabilities, offering a practical solution to the challenge of safeguarding both human life and educational infrastructure. The blended learning model adopted by Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University also reflects a broader national trend toward hybrid educational ecosystems, which Zayachuk identifies as essential for maintaining quality assurance during wartime. In this respect, the Underground University emerges as a concrete institutional embodiment of policy-level priorities related to safety, flexibility, and educational quality.

Lugovyi et al. (2023) emphasize that the Russian invasion has compounded pre-existing global challenges to higher education, including those stemming from globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic. The case examined in this study exemplifies how these overlapping crises have catalyzed radical pedagogical innovation. The use of subterranean classrooms represents a spatial reconfiguration of learning, while blended instruction addresses constraints on academic mobility and international exchange. These adaptations may be interpreted as acts of institutional resistance, preserving the university’s operational integrity and symbolic role within Ukrainian society despite attempts at systemic disruption.

Antoniuk (2023) highlights security, infrastructure preservation, and human capital retention as defining challenges shaping the post-war future of Ukrainian higher

education. The findings of this study directly respond to these concerns, demonstrating how infrastructural adaptation and digital integration can mitigate educational loss. The Underground University model illustrates a proactive rather than reactive approach, positioning wartime innovation as a foundation for post-conflict recovery rather than a temporary deviation from normative practice.

Finally, Sibruk et al. (2023) stress the pivotal role of educators in fostering adaptability, resilience, and critical thinking among students during armed conflict. The educational practices identified in this study, particularly in-person instruction within protected environments and structured educational excursions, create conditions conducive to the development of these competencies. The emphasis on social interaction, experiential learning, and psychological stability supports students' holistic development and enhances their preparedness for professional and civic engagement in post-war contexts.

In sum, the case of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University demonstrates that the Underground University constitutes a qualitatively new educational practice in conflict environments rather than a mere emergency response. By integrating underground learning spaces, blended instructional models, and psychologically supportive pedagogical strategies, the university maintains educational continuity while simultaneously asserting cultural resilience and national self-determination. This model not only preserves the core functions of higher education under extreme conditions but also redefines the spatial, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of university education in times of war, offering insights of relevance to other regions experiencing armed conflict.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, this study has examined the emergence and implementation of the "Underground University" as a novel educational practice developed in response to the extreme conditions of armed conflict. Using the case of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, the research demonstrates how higher education institutions can sustain academic continuity, safeguard participants, and preserve educational quality under persistent security threats. The findings confirm that education during wartime is not merely a matter of survival but can serve as a space for institutional resilience, pedagogical innovation, and social stability.

The results show that the transformation of bomb shelters into fully equipped learning environments enables the safe resumption of on-site instruction while maintaining compliance with security requirements. When combined with blended and distance learning formats, this approach allows universities to address heterogeneous student needs, mitigate psychological stress, and ensure equitable access to education regardless of geographic location or personal circumstances. The observed shifts in student preferences over successive academic years further indicate that prolonged exposure to crisis conditions generates a renewed demand for physically present, socially meaningful educational experiences.

Importantly, the Underground University model extends beyond infrastructural adaptation. It represents a systemic reconfiguration of educational space, pedagogy, and institutional responsibility, integrating safety, flexibility, and psycho-emotional support into the core logic of teaching and learning. The incorporation of experiential practices, including regular educational excursions, reinforces cognitive engagement,

social connectedness, and professional identity formation, thereby compensating for the cognitive and emotional burdens imposed by war.

In a broader perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on education in conflict settings by offering an empirically grounded and conceptually articulated model of wartime higher education. The findings suggest that underground and hybrid educational practices can serve not only as emergency measures but also as sustainable strategies with relevance for other regions affected by armed conflict or prolonged crises. Ultimately, the experience of Ukrainian universities demonstrates that higher education can remain a powerful instrument of resilience, cultural continuity, and national self-determination even under the most adverse conditions.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that *Liudmyla Holubnychka* is a member of the journal's Editorial Board but was not involved in any aspect of the editorial or peer-review process for this manuscript, including the publication decision.

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### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STATEMENT

No artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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