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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF UKRAINE'S ECONOMIC SECURITY UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF WAR AND POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

Abstract. *This article examines the role of vocational education as a strategic factor in ensuring Ukraine's economic security during wartime and post-war recovery. The main aim of the research is to study the changes in the vocational education system necessary for adapting to the new socio-economic realities and challenges related to the war.*

It analyzes historical examples of vocational education reform, particularly the case of the United Kingdom during World War II, to identify valuable lessons for Ukraine. The study highlights the challenges posed by Russia's full-scale invasion, including the destruction of educational infrastructure, the decline of vocational training opportunities, the mass migration of skilled workers, and labor shortages in key economic and defense sectors. The article also addresses the challenge of maintaining the quality of vocational education amid limited resources and the need for adaptation to the new realities.

The research explores the Ukrainian government's initiatives to adapt the vocational education system to wartime conditions, focusing on legislative reforms, digital transformation, the development of dual education models, and strengthened collaboration between educational institutions and employers.

Particular emphasis is placed on the analysis of the draft law on vocational education, which is one of the key steps in the reform of the education sector. The author highlights the positive changes that the bill proposes,

including improvements to the quality of curricula, integration of modern technologies into the learning process, and the enhancement of the qualification certification system. However, the article emphasizes the importance of further steps in implementing this bill under the conditions of military aggression, which requires the rapid adoption of adaptive educational practices. The article concludes that vocational education is crucial for Ukraine's economic recovery after the war, as it contributes to the preparation of skilled workers for rebuilding infrastructure, developing national industries, and ensuring the country's economic resilience.

A critical aspect of this study is the role of vocational education in Ukraine's economic recovery. The findings suggest that aligning training programs with labor market demands, fostering the development of high-priority industries, and encouraging technological advancements are essential for sustainable national reconstruction. The study argues that an effective vocational education reform is not merely an educational policy measure but a fundamental pillar of national security. It will enable Ukraine to rebuild its economy more rapidly, enhance workforce resilience, and ensure long-term economic stability in the face of external threats.

The results of the research can be useful for the development of policies in the field of vocational education aimed at the effective recovery and development of the post-war economy.

Keywords: vocational education, economic security, war, post-war recovery, labor market, education reform, innovation, international support.

Introduction

Statement of the problem. Throughout human history, wars have repeatedly been catalysts for change that shaped the future of nations. During World War II, when Britain was on the brink of total annihilation, the country implemented important reforms in its education and training system to mobilize human resources to support the war effort. The British government initiated the creation of technical colleges to quickly train specialists needed for the defense industry. These measures not only contributed to victory in the war, but also laid the foundation for the country's post-war economic growth.

Today, Ukraine finds itself in a similar situation, when a full-scale war with the Russian Federation is testing all spheres of public life for strength. The vocational education system, as a key element in the training of qualified personnel, is faced with the challenge of not only survival, but also adaptation to the new realities and needs of wartime. Significant destruction of infrastructure, mass population displacement, and economic instability complicate the process of education and training of specialists to perform work in technical, production, and other areas of the economy. However, as history shows, it is at such moments that the most effective solutions and reforms are born.

The war has caused significant disruptions to the education sector, including infrastructure destruction, population displacement, and a shortage of skilled personnel. In response to these challenges, the Ukrainian government has initiated a number of legislative changes aimed at adapting vocational education to the new realities. In particular, amendments have been introduced that allow the education system to function under martial law, facilitating the rapid retraining of individuals displaced by the war.

It is worth noting that the international community is actively supporting these reforms. Programs, such as the joint initiative of the European Union and its member states, are aimed at modernizing the equipment and infrastructure of vocational education institutions. In addition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) emphasizes the importance of integrating Ukrainian refugees into the vocational education systems of host countries to ensure their employment and contribution to the economy [4].

Reforming the vocational education system can be considered an integral part of ensuring Ukraine's economic security.

Economic security is a fundamental component of Ukraine's national security, as defined by the Law of Ukraine "On National Security". One of its key aspects is the provision of labor resources capable of maintaining the stability of production sectors, adapting to new technological realities and the challenges of wartime. Without adequate human resources, the country's economic security is threatened, which in turn weakens its ability to resist the aggressor for a long time and effectively recover from the war.

Thus, reforming the vocational education system in Ukraine during a full-scale war with the Russian Federation is vital for attracting and developing human capital and forming and strengthening the production and economic potential of our State.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent research indicates a number of challenges and opportunities that determine the future vectors of transformation of this sphere. I. Bereza in the article “The Modern Status of Vocational Education in Higher Education Institutions” (2019) investigated the impact of the Bologna Process on Ukrainian higher education and emphasizes the need to improve the practical training of students through the dual form of education [8], E. Govorov and O. Shulga in the article “Analysis of the State of Vocational Education in Ukraine under Today's Conditions” (2023) investigate the structure of vocational education, identifying contradictions in the interaction between its links and proposing ways of harmonization with the labor market [9], M. Lesnikova, N. Pron, O. Denysiuk and N. Tytarenko in the article “The Role of Educational Materials in Improving the Efficiency of Vocational Education: Previous Experience and Current State” (2023) analyzes the importance of high-quality educational materials in vocational education, emphasizing the need to create a single electronic platform with interactive content [10]. These studies make a significant contribution to the understanding and improvement of vocational education in Ukraine, contributing to modern challenges and integration into the European educational space adaptation.

However, in the context of Ukraine's economic security, no systematic research has been conducted on the role of vocational education. The available scientific works focus mainly on the general aspects of vocational education reform, its adaptation to European standards and integration with the labor market. The issue of its impact on economic stability during the war and in the post-war period remains insufficiently studied. In this regard, this study aims to fill this gap.

Purpose of the article – to determine the role of vocational education as a strategic factor in ensuring the economic security of Ukraine under the conditions of war and post-war recovery based on historical experience; to analyze the impact of the war on the workers training system, the need for its adaptation to new challenges and requirements of the wartime economy. To analyze legislative acts regulating education issues and consider the key provisions of draft law No. 13107 “On Vocational Education”, which establishes new legal regulations for the functioning of the entire vocational education system and is aimed at modernizing the vocational education system, that still operates under the law of 1998. To substantiate that effective reform of vocational (vocational and technical) education is not only an educational, but also a national and economic priority that affects the country's recovery, its economic security and defense capability.

Presentation of the main material

In 2017, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a new basic Law of Ukraine “On Education”, which established a new philosophy for the education system of Ukraine functioning, based on the principles of educational institutions autonomy, academic freedom of teachers, ensuring academic integrity of all participants in the educational process, organizing a safe and inclusive educational space, a new system for ensuring the quality of education, etc. In 2020, a new Law of Ukraine “On Complete General Secondary Education” was adopted, according to which not only general secondary education institutions operate, but also vocational education institutions that ensure students receive complete general secondary education on the new principles defined by this Law and the Law of Ukraine “On Education”.

At the same time, the special Law regulating the acquisition of vocational education by students still remains conceptually inconsistent with the basic Law. In 2027, specialized secondary education should come into effect as a continuation of the reform of the National Secondary School. After grade 9, a student will enter an academic lyceum, choosing a profile and subjects, and will prepare in depth for obtaining a specialty. Another way is to master the high school curriculum and simultaneously obtain a profession. This is admission to vocational schools and professional colleges. Traditionally, the first way is more popular.

According to the Institute of Educational Analytics, in 2024, only about 30% of ninth-graders (95 thousand) went to vocational schools and professional colleges. For comparison, in Switzerland, Germany and Austria this share is up to 70%. In most European countries, the goal is to graduate more than 50% with professional education, since this is what meets the needs of the labor market. Since Soviet times, there has been a living stereotype in society: life is established if you have a higher education diploma. At the same time, the country and the labor market do not need so many white-collar workers (specialists with higher education), but blue-collar workers are urgently needed – skilled workers who can rebuild it. The state cannot maintain a bloated network of universities, where almost 80% of school graduates go, not all of whom want and can study. This is a very expensive pleasure for the country [1]. And it is precisely the reform of vocational education that should become one of the key points on the path to change. Presentation of the main material. The Law of Ukraine “On Vocational (Vocational and Technical) Education” was adopted back in 1998 [2].

Over these 27 years, significant structural changes have occurred and continue to occur not only in the education system of Ukraine, but also in the labor market, to meet the demands and needs of which, in terms of training high-quality human capital, the vocational education system works. However, the provisions of the current Law do not reflect the modern conditions of the environment for providing educational services in the field of vocational education, the needs of the labor market, and are also inconsistent with other regulatory legal acts.

The current Law of Ukraine “On Professional (Vocational and Technical) Education” not only contradicts the new basic Law of Ukraine “On Education”, adopted in 2017, but also other reforms carried out by the state, including those implemented by adopted laws, in particular the decentralization reform and the “New Ukrainian School” reform, etc.

The need to adopt a new Law of Ukraine “On Vocational Education” is due to:

- the adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On Education” in 2017, the transitional provisions of which did not provide for amendments to the current Law of Ukraine “On Vocational and Technical Education”, but provided for an instruction to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine within one year from the date of entry into force of the Law to bring special laws, including the Law of Ukraine “On Vocational and Technical Education”, into line with it;
- the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, a system for assessing the quality of work of educational institutions, etc. and the need to harmonize current legislation with the adopted amendments;
- reforming local self-government, decentralizing financing and management of vocational (vocational and technical) education institutions, and related changes in the powers of local self-government bodies are not reflected in the current Law of Ukraine “On Vocational and Technical Education”;
- dynamic changes in the requirements of employers, the labor market, and education seekers, which require the search for new frameworks and conditions for implementing educational activities;
- the intensification of European integration processes, including in the educational space and in the field of recognition of qualifications, necessitates the need to bring existing norms into line with European practice, and also requires amendments to the current law;
- negative migration trends: a decrease in the number of applicants for vocational (vocational) education and their share among school graduates, on the one hand, and an increase in the tendency towards lifelong learning, on the other, as well as changes in production technologies at enterprises, necessitate the search for new forms of motivation for obtaining vocational (vocational) education and training, new forms of education itself and cooperation with employers.

This is, first of all, about the introduction of a dual form of education, educational standards and educational programs on a competency basis, as well as expanding the role of local authorities and employers in the formation and implementation of educational institutions strategies; - the

development of private institutions that provide professional (vocational) education services. The provisions of the current law "On Vocational and Technical Education" relate primarily to state educational institutions and do not reflect the specifics of the activities of private institutions.

On March 14, 2025, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine registered under No. 13107 the draft Law on Vocational Education prepared by Koval O.V., Babak S.V., Hryshchuk R.P. and other people's deputies of Ukraine. The purpose and task of the draft law is to establish new legal principles for the functioning of the entire vocational education system, taking into account all the above circumstances [3].

The draft Law of Ukraine "On Vocational Education" provides for:

1) introduction of new terminology in order to bring it into line with the basic Law of Ukraine "On Education" and increase the prestige of obtaining professional education, in particular:

- "vocational education" instead of "vocational and technical education";
- "vocational education institution" instead of "vocational and technical education institution";
- "student" instead of "pupil";
- replacement of 17 types of vocational education institutions, including "vocational technical schools", with one main type – "vocational college" and several specific types;
- use of the name of the educational qualification "specialist" ("specialist diploma") in the field of vocational education instead of the term "skilled worker" (skilled worker diploma);

2) creating new conditions and opportunities for lifelong professional education:

- granting a person the right to obtain free professional education in another profession, but not earlier than three years after completing free acquisition of the previous qualification and subject to a confirmed insurance period of at least two years;
- granting the right to a person who, for various reasons, does not have basic secondary education, to obtain professional qualifications in vocational education institutions in accordance with professional standards;
- granting a person the right to obtain professional education without obtaining specialized secondary education, which a person has the right to obtain at another educational institution simultaneously with obtaining professional education or at any other time during his or her life;

3) creation of a new system of financing vocational education institutions:

- introduction of a new subvention from the state budget to local budgets for obtaining professional education, which is directed to the remuneration of teachers (except for those who receive salaries from the educational subvention);
- preservation of two subventions, also provided for by the Law of Ukraine "On Education", for providing state support to persons with special educational needs and for improving the professional qualifications of teaching staff of vocational education institutions;
- maintenance of the material and technical base of municipal vocational education institutions at the expense of the founder (local budgets) (17 specific areas, fixed in the Law, relating to the performance by local councils of the functions of founders of vocational education institutions, and allowing to provide high-quality educational services and ensure the acquisition of high-quality vocational education, in particular: providing the educational process with consumable and educational materials and means; wages for employees of vocational education institutions (except for teaching staff); payment of utilities and energy; payment of scholarships, social payments, other social security in accordance with state benefits and guarantees; construction, maintenance and repair of structures, buildings, other infrastructure facilities, development of the material and technical base (including licensed software) of vocational education institutions, etc.);

4) introduction of new mechanisms for specialized secondary education of a vocational orientation implementing in vocational education institutions (Article 19 of the draft Law), which takes into account the implementation of the "New Ukrainian School" reform, including the

transition from 2027 to a three-year specialized secondary education, which, in accordance with the Law of Ukraine “On Education”, can be of an academic or vocational orientation;

5) strengthening the autonomy of vocational education institutions: independent establishment of admission rules to vocational education institutions; preparation of their own educational and training programs, non-formal education programs; vocational colleges themselves determine where to direct the funds they earn, but at least 70 % – for renovation of premises, purchase of equipment, consumables, etc. and up to 30 % – for encouraging employees and students (on the one hand, such a model stimulates employees of a vocational education institution to legally increase their income, and on the other hand, acts as a guarantor of the development and maintenance of the material and technical base of the educational institution in good condition); it is allowed to place earned funds not only in the Treasury, but also in public sector banks; the ability to open foreign currency accounts to simplify international cooperation and support;

6) introduction of mechanisms for recognition/confirmation of learning outcomes (competences) and qualifications;

7) introduction of reduced working hours for teaching staff (36 hours per week) and fixed-term employment contracts for the head and teaching staff of vocational education institutions;

8) introduction of mechanisms to support vocational education institutions and their “founders” during the transition from state to municipal ownership (in particular, local authorities are allowed to maintain “state vocational education institutions” using local budget funds until their transfer to municipal ownership in accordance with the established procedure);

9) specific forms and mechanisms for combining the efforts of business and education for the development of the vocational education system and the achievement of common interests;

10) introduction of new approaches to the system and tools for ensuring the quality of vocational education (in particular, institutional audit);

11) detailed regulation in Article 40 of the draft Law of the new procedure for the election and appointment of heads of vocational education institutions, on whose managerial abilities and values not only the successful functioning of a vocational education institution depends, but also the quality of work performed by graduates of this institution, provision of services or manufactured goods;

12) features of educational activities of entities providing training at the workplace (in production) (Article 43 of the draft Law);

13) strengthening cooperation between vocational education institutions and employers and expanding and detailing public-private partnership mechanisms, etc. [3].

Draft Law No. 13107, registered in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in March 2025, also contains 19 transitional provisions and amendments to 27 legislative acts, including codes.

The bill is aimed at modernizing the vocational education system, which still operates under the 1998 law and does not meet modern requirements.

If adopted, the draft Law will allow solving a certain number of real problems in the vocational education system that managers and employees of vocational education institutions, administrators and employers encounter in their daily lives, and will also ensure the further development of the vocational education system, taking into account modern requirements and needs of all stakeholders.

The draft law proposes a number of positive changes aimed at increasing the flexibility and efficiency of vocational education. In particular, expanding access to education for people without basic secondary education and the opportunity to acquire a new profession free of charge will contribute to improving the skills of the population.

Reforming the vocational education system of Ukraine in times of war is one of the key tasks directly related to ensuring economic security.

In the context of war and post-war reconstruction of the country, the key task remains to ensure the rapid adaptation of the education system to the realities of the military and economic

situation, which requires synchronization of legislative initiatives with the overall national security strategy.

Ensuring stable funding, state control over the quality of education, and training specialists capable of working in critical sectors of the economy and the defense complex are the key to economic stability, the country's recovery, and its long-term security.

Thus, the reform of vocational education should be not only an educational, but also a strategic element of state policy in the field of economic security, since vocational education provides training for workers who have the necessary skills and knowledge to work in key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, energy, and industry. This allows creating jobs, increasing labor productivity, strengthening the national economy, and ensuring stability in the labor market.

Conclusions

The transformation of vocational (vocational and technical) education is an integral part of Ukraine's post-war recovery. Attracting human capital to the vocational and technical sector, training qualified personnel, improving their qualifications, and ensuring employment are key factors for the country's stability and economic growth. In this difficult period, it is the trained highly qualified specialists who strengthen not only the economy but also national security, which is the basis for Ukraine's recovery. Initiatives to reform the vocational education system demonstrate the understanding that training qualified workers with modern knowledge and skills is the key not only to the country's recovery, but also to economic security, which is the foundation of the country's sustainable development and its defense capability.

It is worth recalling the experience of Israel, which, being in a state of constant military threat, made education and vocational training the cornerstone of its national security strategy. As early as 1948, one of the founders of this state, the first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, emphasized that “the future of Israel depends on education”. He considered investment in human capital as a strategic priority for ensuring national security and sustainable development of the country. Investment in education, science and vocational training worked as an investment in the future, allowing the country to create a high-tech economy and a powerful armed forces, which ensured its survival and prosperity in adverse conditions.

Ukraine has a unique opportunity to use a similar approach, adapting the vocational education system to the needs of wartime and post-war reconstruction. This requires not only the modernization of educational programs, but also the creation of flexible mechanisms for cooperation between educational institutions, industry and state institutions. Involving international experience and support, as is done through projects of the European Union and other partners, will contribute to accelerating reforms and improving the quality of specialist training.

Historical experience shows that reforming vocational education in times of war is not only a necessity, but also a favorable opportunity to strengthen national security and lay the foundation for future development.

As Winston Churchill noted during World War II: “Never let a good crisis go to waste”. Ukraine has a chance to turn current challenges into opportunities by creating a vocational education system that will meet modern requirements and contribute to building a high-tech, economically developed state.

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