NOVEMBER 2026

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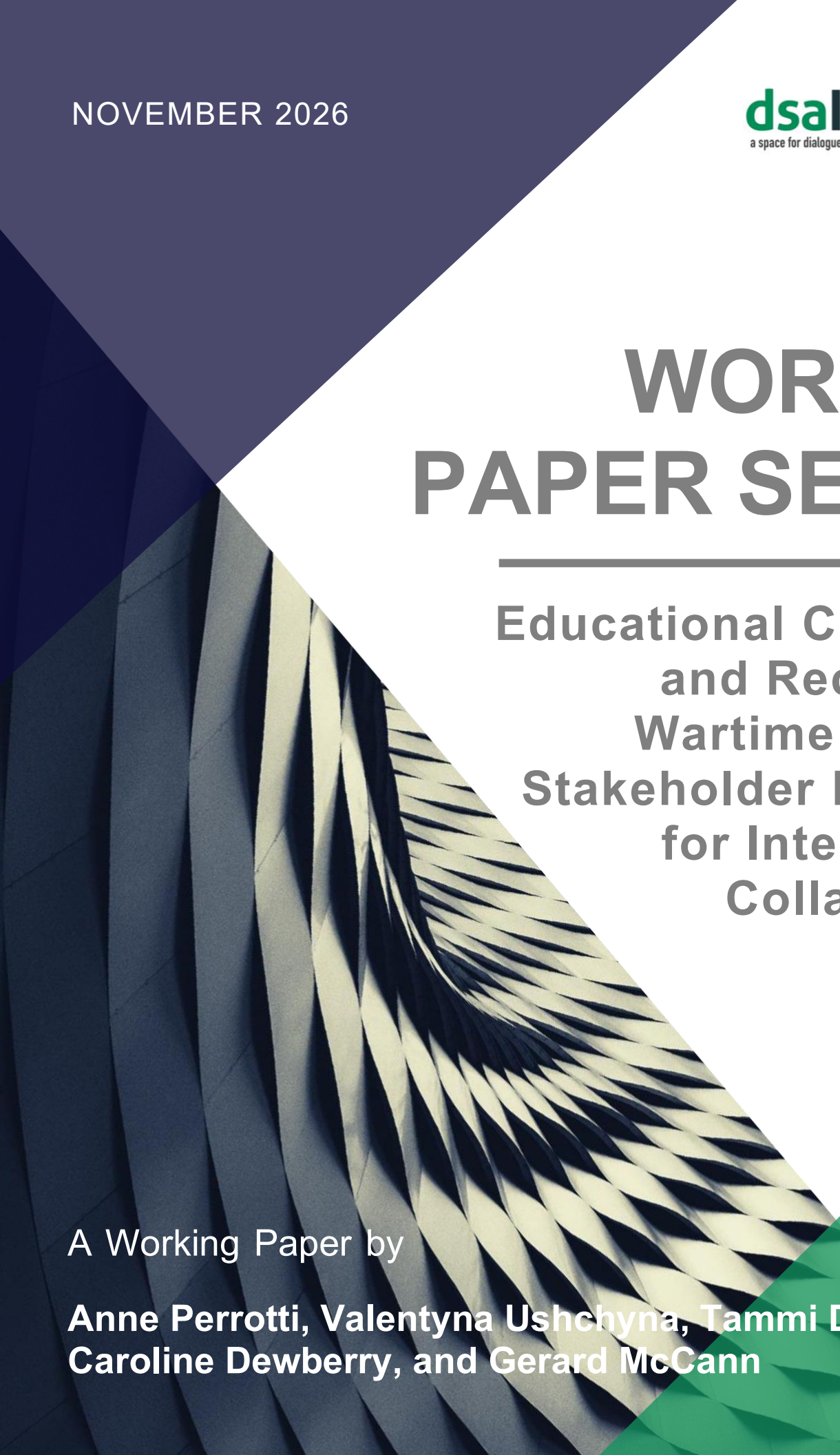
Educational Continuity and Recovery in Wartime Ukraine: Stakeholder Priorities for International Collaboration



A Working Paper by

Anne Perrotti, Valentyna Ushchyna, Tammi Dice, Caroline Dewberry, and Gerard McCann

ABSTRACT

War has disrupted education across Ukraine, creating urgent needs for educational continuity and recovery. This study examines stakeholder experiences and priorities through thematic analysis of notes from four group discussions with nine Ukrainian stakeholders. Findings highlight efforts to sustain learning alongside challenges involving psychological well-being, institutional resources, and educational access. Stakeholders identified professional learning, mental health support, instructional modernization, and workforce development as priorities for international collaboration. The findings offer a foundation for partnership planning, emphasizing alignment with Ukrainian stakeholders' priorities and institutional capacities in supporting educational continuity and longer-term recovery.

KEYWORDS: Ukraine | Education |Recovery | War |Pedagogy | Resilience

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1] Introduction

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine reflect centuries of contested sovereignty and Russian opposition to Ukrainian political independence and cultural identity (Ryvchin, 2022; Yevsieieva et al., 2022). These tensions manifested through periodic military actions, political maneuvering, cyber warfare, and diplomatic confrontations, and escalated in 2014 with Russia annexing Crimea (Hai-Nyzhnyk, 2022). The conflict intensified in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion and widespread attacks on military and civilian infrastructure (Hai-Nyzhnyk, 2022; Yevsieieva et al., 2022).

As in other conflicts (Allwood et al., 2002), children and families have experienced displacement, injury, loss, psychological trauma, and restricted access to essential services (Bürgin et al., 2022; Marconi & Lira, 2023). The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (2026) verified that at least 766 children were killed and 2,540 injured between February 24, 2022, and January 31, 2026, and estimated that the actual totals were higher. In February 2026, UNICEF (2026) reported that about 2.59 million Ukrainian children remained displaced, including more than 791,000 within Ukraine and about 1.8 million abroad. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine (2026) documented the deportation or transfer of 1,205 children by Russian authorities and concluded that the authorities had also committed enforced disappearance of deported or transferred children.

To better understand these dynamics, this study is informed by two complementary theoretical perspectives. Beck's (1999) concept of "world risk society" provides a lens for examining how large-scale, persistent risks—such as war—reshape institutional structures and require ongoing adaptation. At the same time, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model offers a framework for understanding how individual experiences, institutional responses, and broader societal forces interact across multiple system levels. These perspectives provide a framework for interpreting the educational disruptions and adaptations observed during the ongoing conflict.

2] Educational Context

The prolonged war in Ukraine has significantly impacted the country's educational system, reshaping how education is accessed, delivered, and experienced. Ukraine's education system encompasses compulsory primary through secondary education, as well as vocational, higher, and adult education (Eurydice, 2026), with schools serving as sites of instruction, safety, and cultural preservation. Prior to the war, the country was in the process of implementing the New Ukrainian School reform, an initiative aimed at transforming and modernizing education while moving away from post-Soviet schooling. Designed to be implemented in phases, the reform had just completed its first stage when the invasion began, which introduced challenges to further rollout (Hrynevych et al., 2023).

Following Russia's full-scale invasion, the stability of this system was severely compromised, with school buildings and institutions being destroyed, communities and families displaced, and consistent access to education disrupted. In response, educational institutions adopted alternative instructional methods, including online, hybrid, and asynchronous formats, often implemented under emergency conditions and with many classrooms operating in underground bomb shelters (Ferguson, 2023; Shuliak et al., 2024). While these modifications have supported continued educational access, prolonged conflict has significantly altered Ukraine's educational system and its capacity to serve learners nationwide.

3] Educational Impacts

Students and Educators

For children and students in Ukraine, prolonged disruption to the educational system has resulted in interrupted schooling, resource scarcity, loss of learning, and heightened psychological stress (Zamkowska, 2026). By March 2023, over 3,500 educational institutions had been damaged by bombing or shelling, with 365 facilities destroyed completely (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2024). In September 2025, UNICEF reported that 4.6 million children faced continuing educational barriers as another academic year began

(UNICEF, 2025b). Among those able to remain enrolled, schooling often occurred under unstable conditions, with teaching and learning having to take place in unconventional environments such as underground metro stations, nuclear bomb shelters, or on heated rail cars (Ferguson, 2023; Higgins, 2023).

These disruptions have created significant and measurable academic consequences for students. Assessment findings have indicated Ukrainian students have experienced an average learning loss equivalent to up to two years in some subjects (U.S. Fund for UNICEF, 2025), with teachers reporting a significant decline in academic skills (UNICEF, 2023). Ongoing exposure to violence and uncertainty has also contributed to elevated levels of sadness, anxiety, and loneliness among students (Polyvianaia et al., 2025). In addition, students have reported the psychological toll associated with the war, including insomnia stemming from recurring nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and chronic fear (Kurapov et al., 2023; Pavlova & Rogowska, 2023). Together, these psychological and academic impacts have undermined students' capacity to engage fully in their learning.

Not only has the war affected the experiences of students, it has also had a significant impact on teachers, staff, and administrators. Educators in Ukraine have reported heightened psychosocial distress and emotional exhaustion, with many noting that these challenges have negatively affected the quality of their teaching (Lavrysh et al., 2025). As a result, there has been an increased need for psychological and mental health support for educators, as well as targeted training to support teachers in responding to their students' needs (Nadyukova & Frenzel, 2025; Velykodna et al., 2023).

School psychologists, who often serve as the primary providers of mental health support within schools, faced similar challenges due to the prolonged and intense nature of the war. In addition to supporting students and faculty navigating grief and trauma, these professionals must also manage their own mental health needs while working in environments affected by scarcity and violent disruptions (Velykodna et al., 2023). Beyond the psychological toll, educators continue to face instructional challenges stemming from limited educational resources, difficulties engaging students, and technical barriers due to prolonged remote and hybrid teaching (Avsheniuk & Seminikhyna, 2025; Pustovoichenko et al., 2024).

Higher Education

The war in Ukraine has also profoundly disrupted higher education, affecting not only students but faculty and staff as well. In February 2025, Popović (2025) reported that approximately one fifth of Ukrainian higher education institutions had been partially damaged or entirely destroyed and that about 20% of academic and research staff had taken refuge abroad. Funding for research within higher education institutions has also been significantly reduced, with cuts of nearly 60% to funding for fundamental research (Ivanenko, 2024). As a result, these disruptions have undermined institutional stability and their ability to sustain instruction, retain students and staff, support students, and undertake research. Nevertheless, Ukrainian universities have continued operating through adaptations to teaching and institutional arrangements, supported by the commitment of their personnel and international cooperation (Ivanenko, 2024; Popović, 2025).

Families and Communities

The ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine has significantly disrupted family systems and community structures, with direct implications for educational stability and support networks. Widespread displacement, the destruction of homes, loss of family members, and economic strain have altered families' capacity to support children's learning and engagement with education (Kostenko et al., 2024). War-related family separation has altered caregiving arrangements in Ukraine, including mothers caring for children while fathers serve in the military and grandmothers caring for grandchildren in parents' absence (Chemerys et al., 2025). Studies have also documented parental burnout among Ukrainian mothers and grandmothers (Chemerys et al., 2025) and substantial symptoms of anxiety and depression among Ukrainian parents (Naeem et al., 2025).

Prior to the war, schools in Ukraine served a central role in supporting both families and communities by providing consistent routines, cognitive and educational structure, and opportunities for social interaction. As educational disruptions have increased, many of these stabilizing functions have shifted from schools to parents and caregivers, often without institutional support.

Beyond the family unit, schools also function as critical community pillars that preserve Ukrainian culture, foster social interaction, and provide a sense of normalcy and stability (Beketova & Beck, 2025; UNICEF, 2025a). Therefore, the destruction, closure, and disruption of educational institutions extend far beyond learning loss, affecting broader community stability and well-being. In conflict-affected regions, the availability of educational services has influenced family decisions on whether to stay or move, highlighting the role of schools in sustaining communities during such prolonged conflict (Beketova & Beck, 2025; Ivanov et al., 2025). Collectively, the disruptions to education have weakened both community resilience and family support systems, contributing to increased educational instability for those in war-affected regions.

Veterans

The war in Ukraine has also produced a rapidly growing population of veterans and service members needing reintegration into civilian life, with estimates reaching up to four million individuals (International Organization for Migration, 2025). For veterans, education plays a central role in reintegration by providing access to higher education and vocational training opportunities, with many universities developing programs specifically to support veterans (Shkoliar et al., 2025). However, due to the duration and intensity of the armed conflict in Ukraine, substantial institutional adaptations are required to support educational access for veterans. These adaptations include strengthening and expanding Veteran Development Centers across universities, implementing faculty and staff training focused on PTSD and trauma support, disability access, and enhancing interagency and organizational partnerships (Shkoliar et al., 2025).

4] Responses

In response to the educational disruption resulting from the war, targeted interventions have been implemented at the community, institutional, and national levels. These efforts have focused on alternative teaching methods, structural adaptations, and targeted support initiatives (such as adaptive learning) designed to maintain access to education under unstable conditions. At the school level, institutions have adopted remote, hybrid, and

asynchronous learning formats, with approximately 1,500 schools operating entirely online due to widespread security risks (Ukrinform, 2025). National online programs, such as the All-Ukrainian School, have supported displaced students and educators with access to video lessons, assessments, and instructional materials to enable continuous education. In regions where in-person instruction remains possible, schools have implemented protective measures including underground classrooms and staggered instructional times to protect students from active threats (Ferguson, 2023; Malysh et al., 2025).

Higher education institutions have implemented similar instructional and structural changes to maintain academic continuity and systemic operations. Many universities have relocated from occupied territories to regions under Ukrainian control, while legislative measures have also modified the admission process by shifting previously paper-based exams to online formats, expanding access for students who are displaced or living in conflict-affected regions (Ivanenko, 2024; Zayachuk, 2025).

Beyond instructional adaptations, capacity-building efforts have been prioritized to support institutions and educators through trauma-informed and psychosocial initiatives. These efforts include first aid and emergency response, crisis management, and mental health support designed to help educators recognize and support trauma behaviors within educational settings (Forrest, 2025; United Nations in Ukraine, 2025). Non-governmental organizations and international partners have complemented these efforts by providing digital learning resources, learning centers, professional development and institutional support, including grants and academic partnerships for higher education institutions (UNESCO, 2025; Zayachuk, 2025).

5] Gaps in Literature

Assessments of educational needs in Ukraine rely heavily on large-scale surveys and reports from governmental and international partners. These sources document quantifiable indicators such as device availability, resource shortages, and infrastructure damage (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022). Such measures inform resource allocation but offer limited insight into how students and educators experience disruption and what support

they need (Ivanov et al., 2025). Few qualitative studies have examined these needs from the perspectives of stakeholders living in Ukraine.

6] Significance of Current Study

This study examines educational challenges, existing capacities, and priorities for international collaboration identified through Education Development in Ukraine in War and Peace (EDUWAP), an international education partnership. Drawing on a secondary analysis of notes from stakeholder discussions convened for partnership planning, the study addresses two questions: (1) What educational challenges and existing capacities were documented? (2) What priorities for international collaboration were identified? The findings offer an exploratory basis for aligning collaborative initiatives with stakeholder priorities and institutional capacities.

7] Methodology

Research Design and Analytic Framework

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach (Sandelowski, 2000) to the secondary analysis of existing EDUWAP meeting notes generated during partnership planning discussions with Ukrainian stakeholders. These discussions were originally convened to inform international collaboration rather than to collect research data. The existing notes were subsequently analyzed to examine educational challenges, existing capacities, and priorities for international collaboration. The data consisted of notetakers' written accounts of the discussions rather than verbatim transcripts of stakeholders' responses. Using existing documents as qualitative data required attention to their original purpose, context, and suitability for addressing the research questions (Bowen, 2009).

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process, using an inductive, descriptive approach. Consistent with qualitative description, the analysis

focused on summarizing the experiences and priorities documented in the notes rather than developing an abstract theoretical explanation (Sandelowski, 2000).

Context and Data Source

The dataset originated in four semistructured group discussions conducted via Zoom in October 2024 as part of the EDUWAP consortium (Education Development in Ukraine in War and Peace). At that time, the partnership included two U.S. institutions, one institution in Northern Ireland, and one Ukrainian institution. The discussions followed pre-established questions about how educational systems were functioning during the war, emerging needs, and opportunities for international collaboration.

The partnership sought perspectives from school education, higher education, public administration, and civil society (see Table 1). A partner based in Ukraine recruited stakeholders through professional and community networks and referrals from colleagues. The stakeholders had no formal affiliation with EDUWAP. Nine Ukrainian stakeholders participated, with two to three per discussion and no repeat participation.

Each discussion lasted about one hour. Eleven facilitators and notetakers from academic and development organizations attended all four discussions. They shared responsibility for asking questions and facilitating dialogue. A partner based in Ukraine led the discussions, and interpretation was available as needed. Most stakeholders spoke English.

The analytic dataset consisted of five sets of independently recorded notes produced by individuals affiliated with the U.S. universities and submitted to the researchers for analysis. These notes represented all four discussions. Each contributing notetaker produced approximately one to three pages per discussion. All notes were written in English and were not subsequently expanded. They documented key statements, contextual details, and summaries of the discussions. Overlapping content was expected because the notetakers documented the same discussions. The discussions were not recorded.

Ethical Approval and Considerations

An institutional human subjects research committee determined that the secondary analysis of existing partnership discussion notes was exempt from an institutional Ethics Review Board review. The analytic notes excluded names and direct identifiers and were securely stored on passcode-protected computers.

Consistent with ethical guidance for research conducted in conflict and post-conflict settings, the research team prioritized participant protection and sensitivity to the conflict setting (Campbell, 2017; Moss et al., 2019). To reduce the risk of deductive disclosure, findings are organized by theme and stakeholder characteristics are reported only at the sector level. Excerpts from the notes are identified as notetakers' written accounts rather than verified quotations of stakeholders' speech.

Data Preparation and Analytic Procedures

The two principal investigators led the analysis. They independently engaged in repeated readings of the de-identified notes to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively by both researchers from the content of the notes rather than applying predetermined categories based on the discussion questions. Coding drew from recurring concerns and priorities across discussions.

Through iterative discussions, the researchers worked together to group related codes and data excerpts to construct provisional descriptive themes across the dataset. Attention was given to identifying themes recurring across discussions that cut across educational levels and stakeholder roles, reflecting systemic rather than isolated concerns. Analytic memos and discussions between the two analysts supported consideration of alternative interpretations and refinement of the relationships among codes, themes, and supporting notes.

Following this initial human coding and theme development, the notes were cleaned by one of the researchers to remove unrelated material and submitted to Insight7 and MAXQDA to analyze the data and generate codes and themes. The researchers compared the AI-generated analysis with their independently developed themes and adopted some AI-generated wording that they judged to describe those themes more clearly. Following

comparison of the two human analyses and the AI-generated outputs, the analysts finalized five themes. The researchers then revisited the original notes to identify any additional relevant data. In preparing the results, they sought to represent comments from all five sets of notes, whether through selected excerpts or paraphrases of related content. Quoted excerpts retain the wording of the notes. Brackets indicate expanded abbreviations or words supplied for clarity.

All 11 facilitators and notetakers were invited to review the codes and themes. Several responded affirmatively and expressed agreement with the analysis. No concerns or suggested revisions were received. Nonresponse was not interpreted as endorsement.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness was supported through efforts to establish credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through collaborative analysis between two co-principal investigators (co-PIs), allowing for multiple perspectives to inform theme development. Repeated engagement with the notes, iterative review of codes and themes, and analytic memos enhanced dependability. Confirmability was supported through analytic memos and reflexive dialogue in which the two researchers examined how their assumptions, positionality, and partnership roles shaped interpretation, considered alternative interpretations, and checked developing themes against the supporting notes. Because the discussions were not recorded, the wording in the notes could not be checked against recordings, and some nuance, contextual detail, and features of group interaction may not have been captured.

Transferability was supported by describing the partnership context, stakeholder roles and recruitment, discussion procedures, and characteristics of the note-based dataset. These details enable readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other educational and partnership settings, while considering the circumstances in which the accounts were generated.

Researcher Positionality

The authors are researchers based at universities in the United States and Europe who collaborate with Ukrainian educational institutions through the EDUWAP initiative. Two authors served co-PIs and conducted the analysis. Four of the five authors participated in the original discussions as notetakers. All authors contributed to the conceptual framing and writing of the manuscript.

The co-PIs are external to the Ukrainian education system and recognize that their institutional and national locations shaped the research process. As international collaborators, they acknowledge the potential influence of Western epistemological perspectives in shaping how data were interpreted and framed. A co-author familiar with the Ukrainian educational context reviewed the codes and themes and expressed agreement with the analysis.

The researchers also acknowledge that their interest in developing educational partnerships may have directed their attention toward needs and opportunities suited to international collaboration. Additionally, the analysis relied on notes contributed by individuals affiliated with U.S. universities, adding a layer of interpretation between stakeholders' contributions and the subsequent research analysis.

8] Results

The secondary analysis of notes summarizing discussions with Ukrainian educational stakeholders resulted in five descriptive themes: (1) educational context, (2) existing strengths, (3) systemic barriers, (4) future-oriented change with support, and (5) recovery and workforce development. The notes documented intersections between resilience, innovation, and community engagement. Educational institutions were described as sites of learning, emotional support, collaboration, and community engagement during conflict. Technological enhancement, international partnerships, and trauma-informed approaches were identified as potential strategies to support educational continuity and recovery.

The themes below draw on summaries and excerpts from the meeting notes. Quotation marks enclose the notetakers' written wording. The discussions were not recorded, so the excerpts represent notetakers' accounts of what stakeholders said.

Theme 1: Educational Context

The notes described education as occurring within a complex environment shaped by war-related disruptions, financial strain, and the need for quick institutional adaptation. Educational institutions not only maintain academic activities but also serve as sites of safety and support. One excerpt documented interruptions to learning and difficulties concentrating: "Lectures are interrupted by air raids. Hard to concentrate during raids. Depression and stress make it hard to focus when fear [a] bomb will drop on house. Have learned to practice well-being strategies." A separate excerpt described efforts to adapt psychological support and coursework to immediate needs, noting "a focus on PTSD and cog[nitive] behav[ioral] interventions. Teaching a course to students called trauma focused therapy to address students' immediate needs."

Stakeholders described establishing bomb shelters, responding to displacement, and navigating resource shortages. One note recorded that "Ed[ucation] institutions provide places to hide people and feed them." Another noted, "The schools today are dealing with shelters against the terror of war." Stakeholders described increased reliance on digital tools and online learning to maintain academic continuity. As one note recorded, "Implementation of technology in [the] learning process made [the] learning process more flexible." The notes also identified a need to share strategies for conflict resolution and constructive communication. One excerpt reads, "Need conflict resolution and pos[itive] comm[unication] strategies to prevent hate. Want guidance and strategic vision for introducing this to students and teachers."

Theme 2: Existing Strengths

Although stakeholders described numerous challenges, they also noted strengths enabling educational continuity during the war. Consistently, discussion included descriptions of teacher dedication and educators as a primary source of stability. Educator motivation, often

linked to patriotism and a sense of purpose, was perceived as sustaining instructional quality despite adversity. Collaboration across schools, universities, and local authorities was described as essential. Stakeholders highlighted partnerships that facilitated resource sharing, volunteerism, and coordinated support for students. For example, one note records, "Ukrainian teachers are motivated. They're guided by their vocation, highly professional, and this gives them optimism." Another note reads, "So many teachers left but those who stayed are doing great work." A third note records, "There is a strong cooperation with schools and local authorities."

Theme 3: Systemic Barriers

Stakeholders identified systemic barriers that hinder progress, many of which were described as longstanding issues exacerbated by the war. Outdated administrative structures and limited institutional autonomy were shared as systemic barriers. These constraints were perceived as slowing innovation and limiting institutional responsiveness. Moreover, funding shortages emerged as a pervasive concern, particularly regarding teacher salaries and access to modern equipment. Stakeholders also discussed gaps in international mobility opportunities and digital infrastructure, noting challenges related to accessing modern learning tools and global collaboration. One note describes the system as "bureaucratic" and observes that it "has remnants of the Soviet system." Another describes limited access to "modern digital tools." A third note links safety to instructional decisions: "To keep safe, they often use online learning but there are challenges with internet access and quality. Would like help creating innovative online classes and need help improving outdated shelters for in-person classes."

Theme 4: Future-Oriented Change with Support

Beyond immediate crisis management, stakeholders shared a strong vision for rebuilding and transforming education systems to better serve future generations and support community recovery. Stakeholders frequently mentioned a need to move away from lecture-based methods toward interactive and skill-focused approaches, highlighting the importance of social and emotional competencies. Mental health and trauma-informed education emerged as critical priorities. Stakeholders highlighted the need for methodologies that address

psychological needs within educational settings. One note records a request for training in "emotional intelligence and adaptability to changes."

Across the notes, international collaboration recurred as a meaningful method of support. Requests for faculty training focused on grant writing, curriculum modernization, and emerging technologies were consistently reported. Stakeholders emphasized the value of internships, cultural exchanges, and summer schools designed to foster leadership, volunteerism, and cross-cultural learning. Stakeholders aspired to global partnerships as mechanisms for educational innovation. The notes also highlighted the importance of shared learning around conflict resolution and communication strategies. One note records, "They are interested in internships and exchanges for teachers and students and the intro[duction] of conflict resolution and non-aggressive communication strategies." A separate note reads, "Want to replicate what works from US education system. Want to develop student and teacher exchanges and exchanges of methodologies."

Theme 5: Recovery and Workforce Development

Stakeholders described education as central to long-term national recovery. Universities were viewed as potential hubs for workforce requalification, particularly for veterans and displaced populations, while youth leadership, volunteerism, and community engagement were emphasized as pathways for strengthening resilience and fostering a sense of purpose among students. The importance of education in supporting veterans' transition to civilian life was reflected in the following excerpt from the discussion notes: "Veterans would benefit from reskilling programs that would help reintegrate them into society." Beyond workforce requalification, stakeholders identified the retention of young people as essential to Ukraine's long-term recovery, expressing concern about the departure of students, teachers, and families during the war and the implications for rebuilding the country's educational systems and workforce.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of creating opportunities that would encourage young people to remain in or return to Ukraine. As documented in the discussion notes, "Many students have left to study abroad because of the war. Need to help figure out how to get the students to return home after war. Also how to get them to stay." Stakeholders

suggested that universities could play an important role in addressing this challenge by expanding innovative academic programs, investing in modern laboratories and technology, and strengthening opportunities in engineering and other STEM fields. The notes specifically emphasized the need to "develop innovative labs and tech equipment in universities to entice them to stay." These investments were viewed as important for preparing a skilled workforce capable of contributing to economic development and national reconstruction.

Stakeholders also envisioned universities as centers of innovation that connect theoretical knowledge with practical application. They emphasized the need to modernize teaching approaches, move beyond traditional Soviet-era instructional models, and incorporate more interactive, student-centered learning experiences. As summarized in the notes, "Universities should become centers of innovation. Assure theory is closely related to practice." International collaboration, particularly opportunities to exchange educational practices and expertise with U.S. institutions, was identified as a potential mechanism for strengthening both K–12 and higher education. These partnerships were viewed as opportunities to enhance instructional practices, build institutional capacity, and support educational and workforce development aligned with Ukraine's evolving needs.

Psychological well-being emerged as another important component of recovery. Stakeholders described the emotional effects of war on children, families, and educators, emphasizing that some children experience psychological distress that may not be readily apparent. The notes identified sports, music, art, and psychological support as ways to reach children in distress. As one excerpt observes, "Some are quietly suffering." Stakeholders also identified shortages of professionals with specialized expertise in trauma-informed interventions, particularly for children and adolescents. Beyond expanding access to psychological services, stakeholders emphasized the importance of developing evidence-informed interventions, strengthening professional training and clinical supervision, and reducing stigma associated with seeking psychological support. The notes also record that Ukrainian schools "need supervision of student counselors and counselors of children/adolescents [need to train more supervisors]." These priorities reflected the need to address immediate psychological concerns while developing sustainable mental health support systems capable of responding to the longer-term effects of war.

Across these discussions, stakeholders expressed optimism about the role of young people in Ukraine's future, emphasizing their potential to contribute to rebuilding the country. As reflected in the discussion notes, "Young people are their future and they are looking ahead optimistically because the children will grow to work to recover their country." Collectively, these perspectives positioned education not only as a means of maintaining learning during conflict but also as a foundation for workforce preparation, psychological recovery, community resilience, and long-term national development.

9] Discussion

This study complements quantitative assessments of infrastructure damage and resource scarcity by examining how Ukrainian stakeholders described educational challenges, institutional strengths, and recovery priorities. Their accounts connect immediate efforts to sustain learning with longer-term efforts to modernize educational practices and build institutional capacity.

The institutional adaptations described by stakeholders may also be considered within the broader context of societal risk and uncertainty. Beck's (1999) concept of the "world risk society" provides a perspective for understanding how institutions respond to complex and unpredictable threats. Within the specific context of war in Ukraine, stakeholders described the challenges of maintaining educational continuity amid physical insecurity, displacement, and financial constraints. The establishment of shelters, adoption of online learning platforms, and provision of community support illustrate how educational institutions have adapted their operations in response to these conditions. These findings suggest that institutional resilience involves not only responding to immediate disruptions but also developing the capacity to maintain educational functioning under prolonged uncertainty.

Stakeholders identified educator dedication as an important source of educational stability. Educators' commitment, often described in relation to patriotism and a sense of professional purpose, was perceived as helping institutions maintain educational activities despite resource shortages and personal psychological distress due to the war. These accounts highlight the importance of human and relational resources in sustaining education

during conflict, alongside the institutional and material resources necessary for continued operations. From a bioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), these findings illustrate how educational experiences and institutional responses can be understood in relation to interactions across multiple system levels. At the microsystem level, educator dedication and student experiences reflect immediate interpersonal processes shaping learning. At the mesosystem and exosystem levels, institutional adaptations and community partnerships support continuity under disrupted conditions. At the macrosystem level, the broader context of war and educational policy structures the risks and constraints within which education operates. Although these findings do not establish causal relationships among system levels, this ecological perspective provides a useful framework for considering how individual, institutional, and societal conditions intersect to shape educational experiences during conflict.

At the same time, reliance on educator dedication raises concerns for the long-term sustainability of the educational system. While individual commitment can provide educational continuity during periods of crisis, it cannot replace sustained institutional support. Continuous dependence on educators to maintain instructional quality while navigating psychological distress, resource shortages, and the consequences of war may place additional strain on educators. Because of this, efforts to strengthen educational resilience should include intentional resources dedicated to educator well-being, professional development, and psychological support. Investing in educator well-being supports not only individual educators, but also the long-term stability of the educational system.

Despite the localized resilience, stakeholders' accounts suggest that broader systemic barriers continue to hinder educational progress. Stakeholders explicitly noted that longstanding issues, such as outdated administrative structures and limited institutional autonomy, have been exacerbated by the war. These constraints were described as slowing innovation and limiting institutional responsiveness in emergency conditions. Furthermore, funding shortages were identified as impacting teacher salaries and restricting access to modern learning tools and digital infrastructure. These noted issues suggest that educational recovery efforts may need to go beyond immediate physical reconstruction to address foundational, administrative, and financial reforms.

While restoring access to educational resources and repairing damaged facilities are vital components of recovery, physical reconstruction cannot resolve long-standing institutional challenges that existed before the start of the war. Without proper attention to institutional capacity, access to educational resources, and funding, these barriers may continue to hinder educational development even as physical facilities are restored. Therefore, educational recovery must not only consider what must be rebuilt, but also which institutional practices may need to be reconsidered as Ukraine moves toward long-term recovery.

Significantly, the stakeholders in this study expressed aspirations that extend far beyond mere crisis management; there were shared priorities for transforming the educational system to better serve future generations. Stakeholders emphasized the necessity of moving away from traditional lecture-based methods toward interactive, skill-focused approaches. In response to the psychological distress associated with war, stakeholders identified trauma-informed education and mental health support as critical priorities. Educational methodologies may need to be adapted to address these psychological needs directly within the teaching and learning environment. These findings suggest that while educational modernization is necessary, it cannot be based solely on the adoption of new technologies or instructional methods. Instead, modernization must account for the emotional, social, and psychological needs of individuals within the educational system. Trauma-informed practices, mental health support, supervision for mental health providers, and interactive teaching methods may be viewed as interconnected components of educational recovery and modernization. As Ukraine plans for the future of its educational system, the experiences described by stakeholders highlight the importance of designing learning environments that are not only academically effective, but also responsive to the realities of students and educators.

These aspirations should also be understood within Ukraine's broader educational reform trajectory. Prior to the full-scale invasion, Ukraine had initiated the New Ukrainian School reform, which emphasized competency-based learning, student-centered instruction, and greater school autonomy (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, n.d.). Although the New Ukrainian School primarily addresses general secondary education, its emphasis on

modernizing instructional practices is consistent with several priorities identified by stakeholders across educational settings. Their perspectives therefore reflect not only the challenges resulting from the war but also aspirations that align with Ukraine's ongoing educational modernization efforts. In this context, international partnerships may provide opportunities to strengthen existing reforms and support locally identified priorities rather than introducing externally developed approaches disconnected from Ukraine's educational goals.

To achieve these modernization goals, stakeholders highlighted international collaboration as a vital mechanism of support. Specifically, there were requests for faculty training focused on grant writing, curriculum modernization, and emerging technologies. Global partnerships, cultural exchanges, and internships were identified as opportunities for fostering leadership and cross-cultural learning. These findings suggest that international collaboration may serve both immediate and long-term needs within the Ukrainian educational system. Through knowledge exchange, professional development, and continued collaboration, international partnerships may contribute to strengthening the long-term capacity of educational institutions. However, the potential benefits of such partnerships depend on their responsiveness to local needs and the extent to which Ukrainian stakeholders participate in determining priorities and shaping collaborative activities.

Ultimately, education was perceived not only as a means of sustaining learning during conflict but also as an important component of long-term national recovery. Higher education institutions were envisioned as potential hubs for workforce requalification, particularly for the reintegration of displaced populations and veterans. This expands the potential role of higher education beyond traditional teaching to include a greater role in workforce development and requalification. In doing so, universities may help respond to changing workforce demands, rebuilding human capital, and addressing the social and economic consequences of prolonged crises.

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of retaining and attracting young people whose education and professional development will contribute to Ukraine's future economic and social recovery. Their concerns about students studying abroad highlight the potential long-term implications of displacement for Ukraine's educational institutions and

workforce. Investments in innovative academic programs, modern laboratories, and STEM-related opportunities were identified as potential strategies for encouraging students to remain in or return to Ukraine. These findings suggest that educational recovery initiatives should consider not only immediate workforce requalification but also the development of educational and professional pathways that support long-term workforce retention, innovation, and economic development. Consultation with intended learners, including veterans and displaced people, would be needed before designing programming.

The findings identify priorities for international collaboration in professional development, curriculum modernization, trauma-informed education, mental health training and supervision, and workforce development. Partnerships can use these priorities to identify feasible initiatives with Ukrainian stakeholders and align them with local capacities and existing reforms. Further consultation and evaluation can guide implementation.

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological perspective suggests that educational recovery involves psychosocial support, institutional capacity, and workforce development across multiple system levels. Figure 1 maps selected findings to this framework to identify potential points of intervention. The mapping is exploratory.

10] Limitations and Future Directions

The analysis relied on note-based data rather than recordings or verbatim transcripts. As such, some contextual details, differences in participant perspectives, and nuances of group interactions may not have been fully captured. The two analysts were based outside Ukraine and participated in the international partnership, which may have shaped what they noticed and how they interpreted it.

The nine stakeholders were recruited to inform international partnership-building activities rather than using a research sampling strategy. Their roles and relationships with prospective collaborators may have influenced the priorities discussed, particularly their identification of opportunities for international support. The group format and predominantly English-language discussions, with interpretation as needed, may also have affected

participation and what was noted. Multiple notes from the same discussion cannot establish independent endorsement of a view. Limited attribution restricts comparison across stakeholder roles and settings. These findings are situated within this partnership network and are not representative of Ukrainian stakeholders more broadly.

The discussions took place in October 2024. Subsequent changes in educational conditions and recovery priorities require renewed consultation. Future studies could use prospectively designed interviews with appropriate consent arrangements, broaden participation among students, frontline educators, rural communities, veterans, and displaced people, and examine changing priorities over time. For the partnership, the next step is to work with Ukrainian partners to prioritize feasible initiatives and evaluate their implementation and outcomes. The present study informs initial planning; it does not establish intervention effectiveness or wider applicability.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report no potential conflict of interest.

Funding

This study received no external funding.

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Figure 1

Selected Findings Mapped to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

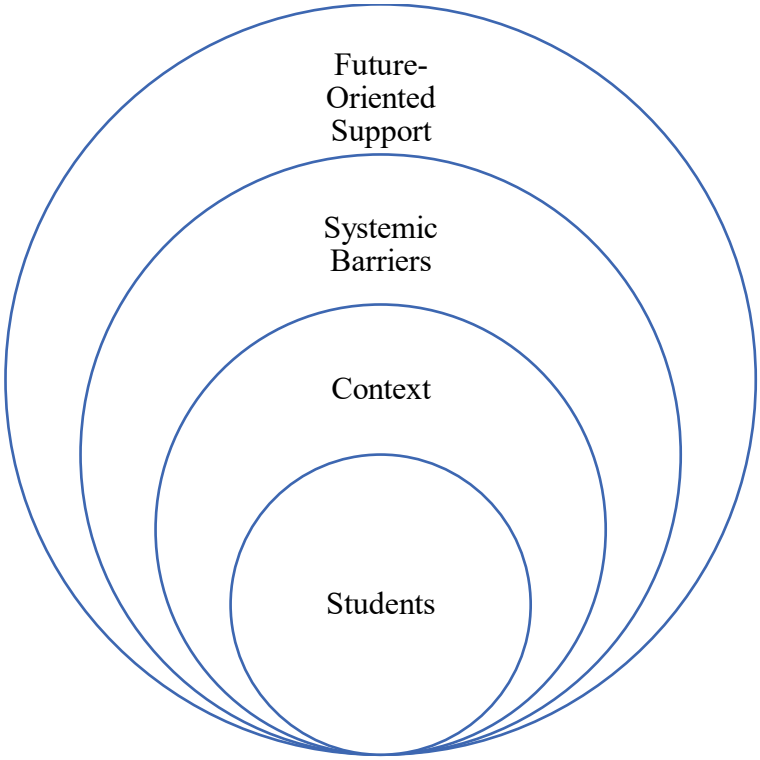

Table 1

Stakeholder Sectors Represented in the Group Discussions

Stakeholder	Interview Group	Professional/Educational Role
S1	1	Municipal education administrator
S2	1	School principal
S3	2	Head of International Cooperation and Project Activities, Lutsk City Council
S4	2	Senior Inspector, International Cooperation and Project Activities Department, Lutsk City Council
S5	2	NGO communications manager / university associate professor
S6	3	University student / former student self-government leader
S7	3	Master's students in English philology / graduate of teacher-education program
S8	4	Associate professor of general and clinical psychology
S9	4	Professor and Vice Rector for Research and International Affairs

Note. Nine stakeholders participated across four group discussions.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the research, the authors used Insight7 and MAXQDA to generate candidate codes and themes from de-identified meeting notes after completing their initial manual coding. The authors compared the AI-generated output with their independently developed analysis and adopted selected wording to describe the themes more clearly. The authors made the final analytic decisions.

During manuscript preparation, the authors used OpenAI ChatGPT (Codex, GPT-6 model family, exact build number unavailable) to copyedit the manuscript and Table 1. The tool was used to align the documents with submission formatting and APA 7 quotation and reference conventions, and to help remove or generalize details that could identify stakeholders. The edits were recorded using Microsoft Word Track Changes for author review.

The authors have reviewed the final manuscript, confirmed its originality and accuracy, and checked the tools' terms of use for suitability for publication. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity of the manuscript, including the accuracy of its references.