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Legal education in Ukraine during the war: From resilience to modernisation

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ABSTRACT

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has transformed the legal education system, creating unprecedented challenges for universities, teachers, and students. The aim of the study is to identify the key challenges posed by the war for legal education in Ukraine, analyse the forms of its adaptation, and outline the prospects for further transformation in the post-war period. The methodology is based on a combination of historical-legal, formal-legal, comparative-legal analysis, case studies, statistical analysis, and sociological surveys. The results showed that Ukrainian legal education remained stable thanks to a combination of several factors: the external nature of the aggression, the digital readiness of universities, an extensive network of institutions, international support, regulatory flexibility, and the voluntary nature of the mobilisation of academia. At the same time, a number of problems were identified, such as unequal access to education depending on location and financial capabilities, psychological exhaustion of participants in the educational process, a lack of practical training, and dependence on digital formats. The article emphasises that the war has become not only a challenge but also an impetus for the modernisation of legal education. In this regard, further development should be based on digital transformation, integration into the European educational space, the development of inclusive infrastructure, and psychological support. Investment in human capital and the creation of a unified legislative framework for legal education will determine the success of its post-war recovery and compliance with international standards.

Keywords: legal education, war, digital transformation, reforms, resilience

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INTRODUCTION

The decade-long Russian aggression against Ukraine has modified the landscape of legal education in Ukraine, creating unprecedented challenges for the legal community and state institutions. It suffered its first serious blow in 2014 after the occupation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbas because universities faced the destruction of infrastructure and the forced displacement of students and teachers (Antoniuk, 2023). Meanwhile, the full-scale invasion of 2022 spread the warfare throughout Ukraine and has aggravated the existing problems sharply. Ukrainian higher education institutions are experiencing difficulties typical of war zones, such as physical destruction of campuses, mass migration, psychological stress, disruption of the educational process, and chronic resource shortages (Abugabr Elhag & Baleela, 2025).

However, the Ukrainian case differs from many other armed conflicts that have occurred or are occurring in recent history, such as in Syria or Yemen (Alawadhi, 2024). Unlike countries where military actions are caused by internal contradictions between different groups within the country (on ethnic, religious grounds, etc.) or confrontation between the government and a part of the people, the warfare in Ukraine is a consequence of external aggression. As a result, the citizens and the state act to solve problems and maintain unity. Moreover, being a secular state,

Ukraine does not have a strong religious colouring to the war. Therefore, this factor has not led to changes in the curricula or teaching approaches within legal education. Regarding the language issue, Russian has long ceased to be the main language of instruction or teaching in Ukrainian law schools. The same applies to the professional legal environment, where office work and official communication are traditionally conducted in the Ukrainian language.

The Ukrainian case is also distinguished by the scale and nature of hostilities, the high intensity of cyberattacks, the pre-war high level of digital readiness of universities, and unprecedented international support (Kayyali, 2024). The new type of warfare, which combines kinetic, information, and cyber operations, has transformed all spheres of society, including legal education. The digital dimension is one of the transformation elements. In this regard, the article analyses the organisational, infrastructural, social, psychological, and financial challenges and digital changes that create the new reality of law schools in wartime. Moreover, education is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine and an important tool for post-war recovery. Therefore, such a multidimensional analysis is necessary for the development of national and international strategies for the resilience of higher education and the rule of law in times of crisis (Milton & Barakat, 2016).

The article aims to identify the key challenges posed by the war for legal education in Ukraine, analyse the forms of its adaptation, and outline the prospects for further transformation in the post-war period. Accordingly, the research objectives are to reconstruct the stages of evolution of Ukrainian legal education, considering the impact of hostilities (1991-2025); to analyse the legislative and organisational measures taken by the state and universities after 2014 and 2022; to assess the impact of the war on student experience and teaching; and to identify sustainability factors and risks for the post-war recovery of legal education in Ukraine.

METHOD

The study is based on a set of research methods: historical legal, formal legal, comparative legal, case study, statistical analysis, sociological surveys (quantitative and qualitative), and systemic analysis. These methods provided a comprehensive picture of the transformations of legal education in Ukraine during the war. The historical and legal method was used for the theoretical reconstruction of five stages of legal education development, from the Soviet period to the present, to show the logic of continuity and breaks in the policies and practices of legal education. This method provided a chronological framework for interpreting events and their cause-and-effect relationships, on which empirical observations were subsequently layered. The formal legal method provided an analysis of laws, standards of the speciality 081 “Law”, and professional qualifications for judges and prosecutors. This method helped to compare normative guidelines with real organisational processes in higher education institutions.

The comparative legal method permits the comparison of Ukrainian practices with the experience of other countries that faced military conflicts. This method helped to identify the unique features of the Ukrainian case and determine which foreign practices could be adapted. The case study method was used for an analysis of specific examples of university relocation and the introduction of digital technologies in law schools. This method permits the description of specific management decisions, infrastructure steps, and educational formats, and understanding how local contexts affect the education policies. The statistical analysis was based on data from the Unified State Electronic Database on Education (USEDE) and the results of the 2022-2024 admissions to track changes in the number of applicants and access to education during the war.

The empirical basis of the study comprises 32 semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and representatives of the administrations of three law faculties in Kyiv and the Kyiv region. The interviews were recorded and transcribed; the materials were stored in the researchers’ personal archives and anonymised, with the prior informed consent of all respondents. They were used to find out the attitudes of participants in the educational process toward the new learning environment during a full-scale war (transitions between offline, online, and mixed formats; organisational changes; accessibility; and quality of educational services) and describe their experiences of these conditions (stress factors, existing support practices, and

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academic motivation). A special emphasis is placed on the respondents' vision of their professional future in law, expected barriers, and key competencies for entering the labour market. The development of interview tools and data interpretation was based on modern methodological approaches.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Evolution of legal education in Ukraine

To understand how legal education has survived and transformed, it is necessary to analyse the processes that have taken place over the past 35 years in higher legal education in Ukraine. Therefore, it is convenient to distinguish 5 stages of legal education evolution. The first period was the Soviet era (until 1991), characterized by a centralised system that lacked a focus on human rights. Before gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine functioned within the legal system of the USSR, which was fully centralised, ideologically controlled, and aimed at serving the needs of the state apparatus. Legal education was limited: there were only six law schools in Ukraine, with about 52 million people. The main areas of professional training included judges, prosecutors, legal advisers at state-owned enterprises, and notaries, who operated exclusively within the state system. The legal profession and education were deeply rooted in party doctrine, i.e., the conformity with the Communist Party policy prevailed, while individual rights, private property, and the rule of law were not considered to be significant concepts. The lawyers' training was standardised, with strict control over ideological loyalty, which excluded the development of independent legal thinking.

The transition period (1991-2014) was characterised by rapid growth and challenges. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine was faced with the need to create a new legal system: independent courts had to be established, law enforcement agencies had to be reformed, and hundreds of new pieces of legislation had to be drafted and adopted to reflect the new political, social, and economic realities. Hence, there was an urgent need for a new type of lawyer for the public and private sectors who would deal with human rights, international law, and commercial and civil regulations. This triggered a rapid expansion of the network of law schools. Thus, the number of institutions that trained lawyers grew to more than 200. However, along with new opportunities, systemic problems emerged, such as insufficient practical training, outdated teaching approaches, and a lack of uniform standards. Universities, including pedagogical and agricultural ones, started opening law schools, which raised concerns about the quality of the educational services provided.

The reform phase (2014-2022) was characterised by stronger standards and institutional renewal. After the Revolution of Dignity and the first stage of the occupation of Ukrainian territories by the Russian Federation in 2014, Ukrainian society and the legal community realised the need for a fundamental reform of legal education. This period was marked by a gradual transition from mass to quality through the introduction of new mechanisms for controlling the quality of education. In particular, the requirements for accreditation of law school programmes were tightened; an external professional entrance exam for a master's degree was introduced (given that a master's degree is mandatory for access to such legal professions as judge, prosecutor, lawyer, and notary). Moreover, the concept of the draft law of Ukraine "On higher legal education and primary access to the legal profession" (Legal Policy Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024) was initiated, although it failed to be adopted. Despite the lack of a consolidated legislative framework, reforms continued; thus, the legal education sector became more structured and in line with international standards.

The stabilisation period during the war (2022-2023) is characterised by the continuity of the educational process. After the start of the full-scale invasion of Russia in 2022, the legal education system faced serious challenges. Thus, the main task of the state was to ensure that students could continue their studies in an emergency. Despite the missile strikes, evacuation of the population, and occupation of some territories, Ukraine managed to stabilise the educational system. During this period a range of key decisions were made that concerned ensuring the

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completion of final exams in an online format, simplifying the procedures for admission to higher education institutions by introducing a national multi-subject test, creating test centres abroad for applicants forced to flee, accelerating the digitalisation in education, relocating some universities from the temporarily occupied territories, and ensuring the operation of several leading law schools, including those operating in the frontline areas. This period became a testament to the resilience of Ukrainian legal education in organisational and ideological terms.

The period of the revival and continuation of reforms (from 2024) is marked by a new impetus for transformation. After the stabilisation of key educational processes, the state has returned to reforming legal education. The war clearly demonstrated what knowledge, skills, and approaches are really in demand. The recent reforms include the introduction of increased admission requirements (the minimum passing score for applicants to law schools is set at 150 out of 200 for contract and state-funded forms of education), the optimisation of higher education institutions through the merger of law schools, the clarification of state standards of higher legal education, the approval of professional qualifications for judges and prosecutors, digital transformation, etc.

This stage is also marked by the acceleration of European integration. In this regard, the need for harmonising national legislation with EU law requires the systematic assimilation of laws, institutional architecture, and procedures of the EU. In response, law faculties and professional associations launched a network of free courses, summer schools, and training sessions aimed at providing students and professionals with practical knowledge on the functioning of EU bodies and the mechanisms of their interaction with national legal systems, thereby supporting and fuelling the nationwide process of legal convergence.

Despite the decrease in the number of enrolled students (a 50% drop in 2024 due to stricter admission requirements), the law major continues to be ranked among the top ten most popular programmes among applicants (DEJURE, 2024). The demand for legal education remains stable even during wartime. Although many young people go abroad to study, which reduces the total number of applicants, the number of those wishing to become lawyers remains virtually unchanged. This is what distinguishes the legal profession from many others. Concerning gender, by 2025, the situation in Ukraine had not led to significant changes in the gender ratio of students, which remained roughly equal. At the same time, further observations of the 2025 admission campaign are necessary to determine whether this trend will continue or whether there will be an increase in the proportion of female students in the context of the ongoing hostilities.

Organisational and infrastructural challenges in wartime

It is important to analyse specific measures aimed at ensuring citizens' right to higher education, particularly legal education. After 24 February 2022, the university community was found in a situation where every decision regarding the continuation of the educational process had to consider five interrelated aspects: physical safety, infrastructure capacity, equal access, finance, academic quality, and the psychological state of students.

It is necessary to begin the analysis with the infrastructure capacity of universities and their ability to ensure the physical safety of participants in the educational process. Although these two factors seem different, they are interrelated since they determine the possibility of maintaining the face-to-face format of education and proper practical training for future lawyers. Therefore, the dual aspect of infrastructure capacity and security is considered in terms of different territorial conditions in which law schools operate. Given the geography of hostilities and the experience of relocating higher education institutions, it is important to classify universities into four analytical groups, each with its own configuration of security risks and resource capabilities.

The first group includes universities that were relocated from temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine after the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022 (Trofymenko, 2022). On the one hand, such educational institutions did not have the technical capacity to remain integrated into Ukrainian databases and educational services. On the other hand, any educational activity within the Ukrainian legal framework was persecuted by the occupation administrations. Students and teachers who tried to continue their studies or work remotely were exposed to the risk of physical persecution, as the Russian occupiers monitored Internet connections, blocked access to

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Ukrainian educational resources, and exerted systematic pressure to prevent even online participation in the educational process. This was particularly true of legal education, which was perceived as a threat to the occupation regimes because it was linked to state values, constitutional principles, and legal consciousness.

Moreover, preserving databases also requires special attention because only some of the physical archives were successfully evacuated from the occupation. However, a significant portion of the paper materials, such as Ukrainian-language library collections, which remained in the occupied territories, were systematically destroyed. In addition, such archives containing students' personal data were used by the occupying administrations to identify individuals and their relatives who might have been associated with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which posed serious risks to their lives and health. In this context, the existence of an electronic education database in Ukraine proved to be useful, as it ensured the preservation of information about students and issued diplomas even under occupation. Owing to this, thousands of Ukrainian students and graduates whose documents had been destroyed or lost were able to obtain confirmation of their status or duplicates of their higher education documents quickly.

As for the material and technical base, if it has not been destroyed, it is often used by the occupying administrations to create new educational institutions subordinate to the Russian education authorities. Regarding human resources, some of the administrative staff, teachers, and students moved to the territory controlled by Ukraine, while others who remained decided to cooperate with the occupying regime and continue their education in the newly created educational institutions. The displaced institutions transferred their activities to territory controlled by Ukraine, to the premises of higher education institutions operating there, as happened in 2014 during the first wave of occupation.

The second group includes institutions that were forced to relocate twice: first in 2014 after the partial occupation of Ukraine, and second in 2022 because of a full-scale invasion. This category of universities is characterised by all the problems described above, relating to infrastructure, security, human resources, and the preservation of educational materials. The third group includes law schools located in cities that are under constant shelling (Kharkiv, Odesa, Sumy, Mykolaiv, and Kyiv). In these cities, the educational process is constantly interrupted by air raid sirens, forcing students and teachers to take shelter several times a day and institutions to focus primarily on remote formats. In frontline cities, this problem is compounded by the destruction of educational buildings and regular power outages. The peak of attacks on energy infrastructure in the autumn of 2024 caused daily blackouts lasting several hours, which made it difficult to maintain the educational process. Despite these circumstances, universities managed to keep functioning. However, the question of how negative factors will affect the quality of education and the psychological state of teachers and students requires constant monitoring and research.

The fourth group includes universities in the central and western regions of Ukraine (Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi, Vinnytsia, etc.). Although complete safety cannot be guaranteed in these cities, their greater distance from the front line allows for a mixed format of learning since 2024. In addition, the situation has been improved since 2024 because significant financial resources were allocated to the construction of bomb shelters with access to the Internet.

An important factor that helped the higher education system survive and continue to function was the extensive network of universities. Almost every regional centre has several institutions with law faculties that train students on a full-time and part-time basis. While so many institutions had previously been criticised as an inefficient use of resources, during the war, they provided flexibility. The digital infrastructure created during the COVID-19 pandemic is also important. Owing to remote platforms, universities were able to partially resume asynchronous learning in the first month after the invasion.

At the same time, distance learning alone does not guarantee safety. In wartime, civilian targets are regularly attacked, so even staying away from university lecture halls is not a panacea. Apart from that, inclusiveness requires special attention: during ballistic strikes, the time for evacuation is limited to a few minutes, and students with musculoskeletal disorders are unable to get to a shelter quickly. An additional problem is the lack of resources to provide support for such

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individuals in educational institutions and at home. This issue is also important given the growing number of people with disabilities among military personnel returning from the front and enrolling in university studies.

Accessibility and quality of legal education

Strategic objectives for the post-war recovery, such as strengthening the energy independence of universities and constructing inclusive shelters on a large scale, are related to the accessibility of legal education. In this regard, it is important to consider how students use educational infrastructure with due regard to security requirements. Thus, it is necessary to single out five main categories of students: students from the temporarily occupied territories, internally displaced persons, students from frontline areas within 100 km of the combat line, students from relatively safe regions (more than 100 km from the frontline), and students who study abroad. Foreign students are also worth mentioning in some countries; they constitute a significant group. However, in Ukraine, foreign students mainly study at medical universities, while foreigners are scarce among law students. Hence, this category is not analysed in this paper.

A differentiated analysis of these groups allows for an objective assessment of the accessibility of legal education in times of war. During the stabilisation phase, the state ensured continuity of education for all categories of students by adopting regulations that simplified the process of admission and completion of studies. For example, the National Multisubject Test (NMT) was introduced for bachelor's degrees instead of traditional testing. It is also possible to take the Unified Professional Entrance Exam in foreign centres for master's degrees. Meanwhile, the increase in the threshold score to 150 from 200 for the law degree in 2024 made competition much tougher than in most other fields. However, given the different levels of schooling due to the shortage of full-time education in the occupied and frontline territories, applicants from these regions have less chance of passing the high entry barrier.

The inequality is also compounded by the financial factor: the cost of studying law programmes is one of the highest in Ukraine, while the number of state-funded places is significantly lower than in other specialities. Therefore, despite the introduction of simplified admission procedures, territorial, academic, and economic barriers remain the main obstacles to equal access to legal education. In the Ukrainian context, this means that all applicants, including internally displaced persons, orphans, children of fallen soldiers, and residents of the affected regions, should be given equal opportunities to study. For this purpose, the state applies positive discrimination mechanisms; for example, it sets quotas, provides scholarships, compensates tuition fees, and provides preferential admission conditions for vulnerable categories (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2025).

However, it is important to combine measures to support access with maintaining high-quality standards to ensure that lawyers are trained to the appropriate level (Grekul-Kovalik & Donchenko, 2022). In general, the affordability of legal education has deteriorated due to the general economic downturn and the loss of income for a large proportion of households, including internally displaced persons and families who lost one or both parents because of the war. Although the contractual tuition fee remained constant formally, its actual price increased due to inflation and additional relocation costs. In contrast, the distance learning format allowed some students to save money on accommodation, which partially offset the increase in other costs.

The next important aspect to analyse is the quality of legal education in Ukraine, which is determined by state industry standards and qualification requirements for legal professions. Hence, it is necessary to consider its individual components, starting with the content of educational programmes. They are formed primarily based on state standards of the bachelor's and master's degrees and additionally regulated by qualification requirements for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and notaries and current market demands. Such requests include the digitalisation of the legal profession, understanding of the martial law regulation, and a focus on European integration prospects (Judiciary of Ukraine, 2024). To enter the master's programme, which is mandatory for full access to the legal profession, applicants must prove their knowledge of several basic disciplines: constitutional law of Ukraine, administrative law of Ukraine and administrative procedure, civil law of Ukraine and civil procedure, criminal law of Ukraine and

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criminal procedure, public international law, and international human rights protection. In addition, applicants must demonstrate skills in a foreign language (preferably English) and logic.

However, universities adapt curricula to new military realities (Salha et al., 2024). After 2022, almost every course has a separate segment dedicated to the regulation of the relevant industry in wartime. Particular attention is paid to the study of human rights and international humanitarian law. Moreover, new modules were introduced to provide students with knowledge of digital tools: working with electronic registers, the E-Court system, the basic principles of smart contracts, etc. At the same time, professors, postgraduate students, and undergraduates are taking intensive courses on EU law to better navigate the future legal framework of Ukraine.

Furthermore, the international component and intensified cooperation with foreign partners transform the content of legal education. Educational programmes include joint courses or research modules implemented together with leading foreign law schools. A striking example is the partnership between Notre Dame Law School and the Ukrainian Catholic University. In addition to fully funded exchanges, they develop joint projects on constitutional reform and post-war legal system recovery (Calingo, 2024). The cooperation of several American and Ukrainian faculties is also worth mentioning. Thus, a series of online seminars provided students with the opportunity to learn new formats of practical training, while teachers could compare methods and assess the strengths and weaknesses of legal education in Ukraine (Felstiner et al., 2024). In addition, European universities admit Ukrainian students and contract Ukrainian teachers, supporting their integration into the international academic community (Horinov, 2022).

> *"The support from foreign universities and foundations was unprecedented: thousands of scholarships, grants, and short-term visits. They helped not only science, but also the families of teachers, especially women with children. This has kept research projects afloat and gives hope for the preservation of academic networks for post-war development" (Teacher-[07], lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Kyiv, interview, [March 2025]).*

These initiatives also highlighted the need for the systematic study of legal and academic English or other languages. Proficient language training was previously provided to students of international law; however, currently, proficiency in professional English, French, or Spanish is a competitive advantage for any lawyer. Universities aim to expand their optional language courses, although the supply still does not meet the demand. The development of such programmes should be a priority, as the ability to work with foreign language sources and conduct professional communication will determine the position of Ukrainian lawyers in the European legal space.

Another important aspect is teaching methods and the digital environment, which are now closely linked in Ukrainian law schools. Since the beginning of the full-scale war, universities have digitised most lectures and have turned the virtual learning environment into the main platform for interaction. LMS systems (Moodle, Google Classroom) serve as the basis, and auxiliary services such as Quizlet, Socrative, and Mirror introduce elements of interactivity and gamification (Ashanin, 2024).

> *"Our city was occupied at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Some of our colleagues were temporarily relocated to the Ivano-Frankivsk region, and we resumed online classes while they were still there. After the military liberated the city, we gradually returned to our city and continued our studies without breaking the semester, thanks to digital tools. It was a test of resilience that we passed together with the students" (Teacher-[01], lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Kyiv region, interview, [December 2024]).*

At the same time, the massive transfer of the traditional lecture-seminar model to Zoom and Microsoft Teams without a rethinking of teaching methods exposed the problem of didactic effectiveness. According to a survey in 2022, although 90% of students had a device and access to the Internet, only about half were satisfied with the quality of remote interaction (Osypchuk et al., 2022). The main obstacles were constant air raids, power outages, and a lack of motivation (Semerikov et al., 2023). This problem has already been partially addressed in the context of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Stoliarchuk et al., 2020). During hostilities

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and previous pandemic restrictions, a unique situation has emerged: a significant number of students studied mostly or entirely online during their undergraduate studies or school years.

As a result, in September 2024, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2025) recommended that educational institutions use a flexible combined learning format. In other words, in regions far from the frontline, face-to-face classes should be resumed, while online learning should be reserved. At the same time, technical solutions for self-study during possible blackouts are discussed, such as shared video repositories, offline course packages, and open-source inter-university platforms. In this regard, the problem of student engagement remains relevant because the audience, accustomed to short videos and personalised feeds, finds it difficult to take in several hours of online lectures and needs adaptive platforms that offer individualised tasks and instant feedback. Hence, there is a lack of methodological developments that would combine a traditional law course with elements of microlearning and adaptive testing.

> *"As soon as I had the opportunity, I returned to face-to-face learning: daily, continuous online classes are less effective for me; it's harder to keep engaged. The teachers have adapted the pairs, but there is a lack of individual interaction. After the massive rocket attack on the capital in the summer of 2025, my parents and I decided that it was better for me to temporarily switch back online for security reasons" (Student-[20], 3rd-year law student, Kyiv, interview, [August 2025]).*

It is also worth noting an unexpected positive effect of the accelerated digitalisation of legal education. In addition to ensuring continuity of learning, it brings the educational process closer to real transformations of the legal profession. E-justice, virtual offices, chatbots, and war crimes documentation algorithms are already changing the legal landscape, so leading law schools are integrating courses on artificial intelligence in law, digital evidence, and cybersecurity into their curricula. The online format also proved effective in improving the skills of practising lawyers: numerous private online schools appeared on the market, offering short practical modules ranging from bar exam preparation to crash courses in military law.

However, in many countries, the practical component is considered an equally important mandatory element for admission to the legal profession. This aspect remained the main problem of Ukrainian legal education during the war, creating a gap between the rapid development of digital learning and the lack of live practice in courtrooms or notary offices. Until 2022, universities could not guarantee internships for all students in courts, prosecutors' offices, or law firms; currently, the situation is complicated by security restrictions and the economic downturn. In the frontline regions, judicial institutions are operating in a reduced mode, and private offices have also limited their activities, making it dangerous to organise a student internship. Therefore, after the end of active hostilities, it is necessary to launch wider academic exchange programmes, increase the number of legal classes with the physical presence of students, make greater use of simulated trials in VR format, and integrate online tools into traditional training so that they do not replace face-to-face experience (Hnidenko, 2023).

The psychological aspect of legal education during wartime

Having analysed the components of quality legal education, it is worth focusing on its psycho-emotional aspect, which determines the effectiveness of education. The psycho-emotional state of students defines the success of didactic innovations and digital platforms. A survey at the end of 2022 among law students assessed technical capabilities, learning format, quality of learning, and psychological stability. The first two factors showed good results (more than 90% had a stable internet connection and device, and the hybrid format was found to be functional). Nevertheless, the psycho-emotional component was the most vulnerable. Thus, only 52% of students felt able to maintain concentration and motivation during the class (Osypchuk et al., 2022).

In the period from 24 February 2022 to 20 January 2025, 1,482 air raid alarms were recorded in Kyiv, while in the frontline cities of Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and Sumy, the number was even higher. Each alarm breaks the lecture into fragments. In addition, the overall psycho-emotional state of students is aggravated by power cuts, the flow of information about war crimes,

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the inability to sleep due to attacks on cities, and the personal experiences of students whose relatives serve in the army, are prisoners of war, or are in the temporarily occupied territories.

> *"My dad works as a rescuer for the State Emergency Service in a frontline city. When they clear the rubble after missile and drone strikes on civilian targets, the aggressor often strikes the same locations. Once, during a practical training session, we received a message that as soon as they started a rescue operation at the site of an explosion, a second missile hit them. I took time off work to support my mum, we didn't know what happened to my dad. Luckily, he was almost unharmed, but the feeling of anxiety never left. The support of the teachers and the group helped me a lot to get back to studying" (Student-[9], 4th-year law student, Kyiv, interview, [March 2025]).*

An additional ethical and psychological challenge for law students is the constant exposure to the chronicle of war crimes and examples of international law being ignored, which calls into question the effectiveness of the law. Teachers are not always able to provide convincing answers. In addition, some law students, especially those abroad, give up on further legal education and careers, seeing no prospects for self-fulfilment or doubting their knowledge due to the shortcomings of online learning.

As for teachers, their psycho-emotional state is also under serious strain. Studies after 2022 documented an increase in signs of professional burnout caused by preparing lectures in shelters, checking papers during blackouts, constant anxiety about loved ones, and financial instability, which reduce motivation and performance (Tsybuliak et al., 2023). For many, the priority is not so much the educational process as ensuring the survival of their families (Lavrysh et al., 2025). Another dimension of the psychological factor is related to the return of demobilised soldiers and civilians who survived the occupation or injury in the classroom. This poses an extraordinary challenge for universities because, without systematic psychological support and the introduction of trauma-informed methods, it will be difficult to guarantee the proper quality of education.

Research and stability factors in legal education

The war had a significant impact on the research in law schools (Lavrysh et al., 2025). This component is key to the development of education and practice. Thus, the state immediately declared the priority of preserving human resources: teachers are mobilised only with their consent, which helps maintain the stability of the system. At the same time, the war changed the source base of research. While in the first two decades of independence, Ukrainian jurisprudence relied heavily on Russian-language works due to the language barrier, limited access to Western libraries, and the cultural expansion of the aggressor, currently, this trend is disrupted.

After 2014, the dependence on Russian-language sources began to weaken. Lawyers realised that the ideas of the Russian world are negatively intertwined with legal scholarship, reflecting the state of society and political and legal phenomena. After the full-scale invasion of 2022, a bill was introduced to ban the citation of Russian-language sources due to the propagandistic nature of Russian academia (Andriiets, 2023). Although it was not adopted, the initiative drew attention to the need to expand the source base of research. Modern technologies and international support for a progressive academic environment opened new horizons for Ukrainian scholars. For example, advanced machine translation systems, grants from European and North American universities, and growing global interest in military topics provided access to relevant sources. The focus is on wartime constitutional mechanisms, the transformation of humanitarian law, and the digital evidence base of war crimes.

The resilience of Ukrainian legal education during the war is attributed to a few interrelated factors. First, the aggression is external, so the legal community is not divided into competing jurisdictions. Secondly, horizontal initiatives by students, teachers, and local communities provided social cohesion and volunteer support at the beginning of the invasion. Thirdly, the experience of Crimea and Donbas occupation in 2014 shaped the culture of university mobility and algorithms for the rapid transfer of students to safe areas. Fourthly, the availability of digital platforms and ready-made online courses allowed for continuous learning and quality control.

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Fifth, international support through partnerships with leading foreign law schools provided additional resources and new methodological approaches.

Sixth, the voluntary mobilisation of teachers and students helped to preserve the human resources of the institutions. Seventh, the rapid regulatory adaptation of state authorities ensured students' access to legal education during the war. Eighth, the extensive network of universities in different regions allowed for the relocation of institutions, teachers, and students without failing the educational process. Finally, the specifics of legal education allowed for effective adaptation of curricula to the online format, unlike disciplines that require laboratories or special equipment. Thus, the Ukrainian experience shows that the combination of these factors can preserve and update the quality of legal education in the most acute phases of hostilities.

Discussion

The prospects for the development of legal education should be considered through the systemic impact of the analysed processes and possible transformation scenarios. Investments in human capital and educational infrastructure can be crucial for the post-war recovery and development of Ukraine. The experience of Germany and Finland demonstrates convincingly that education can accelerate economic growth and societal recovery from crises. Therefore, even in the medium term, legal education should be a priority in public policy and become a target of targeted international support (Gardin, 2015).

However, the Ukrainian case is not about restoration but about transformation, modernisation, and implementation of European and North American best practice standards in legal education. In this regard, it is possible to single out three most likely scenarios that can determine the future direction of this area. The most unfavourable scenario envisages a return to the influence of the aggressor state, which would lead to a strict centralisation of legal training. The curricula and professional activities would be aimed at promoting the ideas and values of the Russian Federation, where the key criterion would be loyalty to the state rather than adherence to the rule of law and human rights. In addition, there would be a curtailment of international cooperation with democratic partners and the eradication of Ukrainian national identity.

The second scenario envisages Ukraine's conditional neutrality with slow alignment with the EU, but without clear timelines and with a lack of financial resources and internal and external incentives to continue reforms. In this case, the reforms would remain fragmented, with few strong law schools surviving on student demand and ad hoc support from abroad. An additional negative consequence would be the difficulty in retaining and returning human capital among faculty and students. The third, most favourable scenario is possible under conditions of relative peace and accelerated movement towards European integration. In this case, there are prospects for several key areas of development where systemic efforts would be needed.

The experience of previous reforms shows that without a clear legislative or programme plan, the modernisation of legal education is dispersed between agencies and loses consistency. Such a plan should be developed by a working group with equal representation of legal sector employers, professional self-government (Bar Council, prosecutors, and judges), higher education institutions, and education authorities. Only a coordinated position of these stakeholders makes it possible to establish mandatory and enforceable standards of access to the profession, ethics, and academic quality. As of mid-2025, the draft law to regulate the situation has not yet been adopted.

The next logical step is to calculate the national and regional demand for legal professionals over 10-15 years. This involves combining demographic and econometric forecasting with departmental statistics on graduate employment, in particular, the number of court cases, transactions, and budgetary positions in government agencies. The result should be an agreed target graduation rate, which is used to determine the volume of state orders and licensing quotas for each law school. The experience of foreign jurisdictions shows that a significant proportion of law school graduates do not pass professional exams and choose related career paths. Therefore, Ukraine must establish threshold criteria to ensure that the quality of education is monitored without restricting access to legal aid, especially in remote regions.

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The current model often remains formal. Due to the limited number of places in courts and law firms, many students do not receive meaningful practice. It would be advisable to align enrolment and curricula with the real capacity of practical bases, enter into long-term agreements with partners (courts, authorities, and businesses), and set minimum placement quotas. Meanwhile, university practice should be expanded through moot courts and simulated court hearings in a mixed or online format using modern technologies. An assessment should be based on clearly defined competencies and a portfolio of completed tasks, confirmed by a mentor from the practice base.

Financial and organisational conditions determine the success of reforms in legal education. A rational step is to consolidate universities to reduce administrative costs, concentrate the material and technical base, and increase students' access to internships. Technological solutions are more efficiently implemented through inter-university cooperation; for example, joint methodological and technical centres and collective use of digital platforms and laboratories ensure stable quality and moderate costs. These tasks require predictable funding: a capital formula with performance elements and long-term grants for the development of law schools and mentoring programmes. Without such resources, changes will remain declarative or fragmented, whereas competitive external support for the strongest schools can have a multiplier effect, boosting research and international integration.

With the reduction in the number of law faculties, teaching positions will become subject to fierce competition: only those whose scientific achievements, international mobility, and pedagogical effectiveness are confirmed by publications, and external audits will be able to remain. However, selectivity will not be effective without an adequate financial incentive. The national policy should include a transparent graduated scale of basic rates, allowances for grant projects and certified language competencies, return mobility funds for expatriate professionals, and a mechanism for dual appointments with foreign universities. Only under these conditions will competition contribute to the development of the system, rather than the loss of intellectual resources.

The situation appears more stable among students. Law is the most popular major, despite having the highest contract price in the humanities sector (Remitly, 2022). The combination of a higher passing score (150 out of 200) with external qualification exams for master's programmes and professional exams during training forms a multi-level selection system that sorts out random applicants and focuses resources on the most motivated ones. An additional limiting factor is the cost and duration of preparation for bar and judicial exams, which naturally reduce the attractiveness of the profession for those who do not have clear career intentions. As a result, the competitiveness of Ukrainian legal education depends on the balance of two vectors: a financially supported personnel policy aimed at retaining and returning teachers, and a selective selection of students that ensures a high level of basic competencies.

Therefore, psychological support is key to effective legal education. The war has shaped a student environment with diverse traumatic experiences: demobilised military personnel, internally displaced persons, students who have survived occupation, and those who have returned from evacuation abroad. Without systematic assistance, this audience will not be able to maintain stable motivation or engage in face-to-face classes, which are critically important for lawyers. Hence, the state programme should include 1) a basic module of trauma-informed pedagogy for teachers; 2) psycho-emotional screening of first-year students with further counselling routes; 3) integration of courses on communicating with trauma-survivor clients into bachelor's and master's programmes. Combining these elements will help to transform a post-traumatic audience from a risk factor into a resource for professional development, provided that the return to offline learning is accompanied by debate modules, clinical practice, and a barrier-free support environment.

The strengthening of international cooperation after 2022 is the key feature of the crisis period. Ukrainian legal science, which for decades remained within the confines of local tradition with an orientation towards Russian doctrine, gained direct access to Western practices and EU legal standards. This support goes far beyond guest lectures: teachers and students join grant internships, workshops, and free courses on adapting Ukrainian legislation to EU law.

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Programmes for practising judges are also a unique channel for the transfer of professional standards.

The effectiveness of international partnerships directly depends on language proficiency. Experience shows that most colleagues who participated in international projects had previous experience studying at English-speaking universities or a basic linguistic education. Therefore, specialised language training becomes a strategic priority: state grants for semester internships for teachers of legal disciplines in a foreign language and support for certification programmes (TOLES, ILEC, and EU Legal English) for practitioners. Ultimately, the future of Ukrainian legal education will also be determined by the scale of post-war recovery. Thus, the combination of network autonomy, digital transformation, and international integration can transform it into a space for innovation.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that full-scale war affected all levels of legal education in Ukraine, from material resources and management to programme content and the psycho-emotional state of participants. The classic model of post-war recovery does not fully correspond to modern realities. The resilience of law faculties was possible by a combination of the external nature of the aggression, the experience of relocation in 2014, advanced digital infrastructure, and powerful horizontal self-organisation of teachers and students.

After the start of the full-scale war, universities faced the threat of losing paper archives, instability of energy supply and communications, and the mass relocation of students and teachers. These challenges were minimised through the partial digitisation of educational registers, the transition to asynchronous learning, formalised relocation schemes, and flexible rules for the transfer of credits. The uncertainty of the regulatory environment was also overcome by emergency measures that legitimised distance learning, simplified accreditation, and introduced a special admission procedure.

The psycho-emotional aspect was the most vulnerable element. Students with traumatic experiences and demobilised military personnel require basic screening and trauma-informed training for teachers. Meanwhile, international partnerships became an impetus for innovations in e-justice, humanitarian law, and cybersecurity. Their effectiveness also depended on professional language training, including certification programmes in legal English.

The analysis proved that the resilience of higher education in the digital age and in the face of rapidly changing threats was ensured not by a single solution, but by a complex configuration of solutions. It combined digital resources, regulatory tools activated in emergencies, and extensive interaction between Ukraine and the global community. Their synchronised action not only minimises educational losses but also transforms the crisis into a catalyst for meaningful renewal.

The localised nature of the active phase of the war and significant external support should also be considered to ensure stability. Therefore, strategic planning should cover scenarios of local, regional, and global crises with appropriate mechanisms to ensure continuity of learning and support institutional capacity.

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