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STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. Our research has been conducted in a region of Ukraine where no direct military operations have occurred since 24 February 2022. However, we have been living in the shadow of the horrible ongoing war; regular air raid alarms have had negative impacts on people who feel mental constraints: uncertainty, anxiety, anger, despair, disillusionment, and often hopelessness. Thus, the primary aim of our survey was to get deeper insights

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into the feelings and attitudes of our students towards the war in order to help them process the situation they have been living in.

Methodology. *We have applied the quantitative research method in our study. We designed an online questionnaire using Google Forms with sixteen 16 Likert-scale-type questions. It was administered online to college students aged 17–24, having 17 different majors. Altogether 194 questionnaires were completed and returned during February and April 2023. Descriptive statistics were calculated with the objective of providing a clear and concise summary of the data that would allow us to gain insights into the main topic under consideration, as well as to understand patterns emerging within the data.*

Results. *The findings suggested that students were mostly worried about the outcomes of the war. Students were rather informed about the happenings of the war, although about a third of the respondents claimed they did not follow the daily news from the front. A large majority of research participants were optimistic about the fast and positive ending of the war in spring 2023. In contrast, only approximately a third of the students were absolutely positive about the future of their native land after the end of the war.*

Conclusions. *Overall, it can be stated that the students' attitudes towards the war were rather optimistic. It is two years now that the war has been going on. The initial optimism of our students concerning the outcomes of the war must have changed during this time. Therefore, as a further research direction, a cross-sectional study is due to be performed in which we trace the shift in attitudes of our students towards the war in Ukraine and compare and contrast them with previous results.*

KEYWORDS: *College Students, Distance Learning, Online Teaching, Students' Attitudes to the War, Transcarpathia, War in Ukraine.*

INTRODUCTION

2020-2024 have been a real trial for people in Ukraine. First, the COVID-19 caused serious disruptions in the country. We had to switch to a method of teaching that was hardly known to us until then, online teaching, in order to reduce the danger that was lurking around us.

We started to investigate the issue of distance learning and all the related challenges for both teachers and students in our educational context, at the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education (ICIS TESOL, 2023); Huszti, Csatóry, et al. (2022); Huszti, Fábián, et al. (2023); Huszti, Lechner, et al. (2022); Lechner et al. (2022). We had barely recovered from the pandemic when another blow hit us: our country was attacked and the war began.

Since the start of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, life in Transcarpathia has undoubtedly changed. Compared to other parts of Ukraine, Transcarpathia has been relatively free of direct military engagement. However, the region has seen a significant influx of internally displaced people from eastern Ukraine seeking refuge.

Transcarpathia has become a crucial hub for humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Numerous international organizations and volunteers are operating in the region, providing vital assistance to refugees and displaced persons.

Despite the challenges, the people of Transcarpathia have demonstrated remarkable resilience and community spirit. Locals have opened their homes and hearts to welcome refugees, providing food, shelter, and emotional support. Looking ahead, the future remains uncertain for Transcarpathia and all of Ukraine. The war's long-term impact on the region's economy, demographics, and social fabric is yet to be fully understood. However, notwithstanding the uncertainty, there is also a strong sense of hope and determination to rebuild and recover.

Amidst such circumstances we decided to conduct research among our students of the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, located in Berehove, a small town of about 20,000 inhabitants only six kilometres from the Ukrainian-Hungarian border. The rationale for our survey was to gain insight into how our students related to the war, what feelings and attitudes they had towards it. The survey was conducted about a year after the invasion, by which time the research respondents were believed to have formed their own position and views in relation to the investigated issue.

A great number of papers have been published on the state of tertiary education in wartime Ukraine since 24 February 2022, when the invasion started (Korniush, 2023; Lavrysh et al., 2022; Schulten et al., 2022). Some of them present general theses. For instance, Bondarenko (2022) analyses the challenges Ukrainian education experiences in these trying times. In addition to characterising the current state of Ukrainian tertiary education, Korniytska et al. (2023) propose that at present the asynchronous mode of teaching is the most realistic and practicable in a significant part of Ukraine because of the well-known obstructing factors.

Boyko et al. (2021) believe that in order to provide high-quality education at the tertiary level, distance learning technologies must be applied. This view is also supported by Banyoi et al. (2023), who claim that these technologies are the key to achieving success in higher education in wartime Ukraine.

This opinion is shared by Holubnycha et al. (2022), who write about the effectiveness of mobile technology in tertiary education in wartime Ukraine. The researchers carried out an experiment with 80 first-year university students in two groups, half of the participants in the experimental group and the other half in the control group. In the first group, course material was delivered exclusively via mobile devices, while in the second group only traditional forms of learning were applied.

A major finding at the 0.05 significance level was that student achievement in the experimental group had improved by 15%, whereas in the control group there was a 10% decline. This led the authors to the conclusion that mobile learning technology may play a crucial role in enhancing student achievement in the long run.

Westerlund et al. (2023) aimed to analyse online English teaching and learning experience in higher education institutions in Ukraine through pandemic and wartime. A mixed-method research design was employed focusing on social, methodological, and emotional aspects of education. Ukrainian university teachers of English ($N = 100$) and students ($N = 277$) were asked about their experiences related to the emergency

caused by the pandemic and wartime both quantitatively (via questionnaires) and qualitatively (through interviews).

The researchers found that the major wartime challenges for students were air raids and power outages and, consequently, disrupted communication and isolation, stress and a sense of insecurity, a large amount of homework, no access to the software, inconvenient schedule, and their own unwillingness, which might lead to academic procrastination. However, Cherepiekhina et al. (2023) emphasized that students cannot be blamed for procrastination. Rather, educators need to understand the difficulties that forced online learning might cause to students and should adjust course requirements as student conscientiousness is considerably reduced.

Kostikova et al. (2023) explore online teaching in Ukraine during wartime. A study by Kostikova and Viediernikova (2023) also deals with the problem of organizing online teaching in tertiary education. It presents details about the way online teaching is realized at a Ukrainian university during the Russian-Ukrainian war. An analysis of the challenges Ukrainian tertiary education participants have to face is demonstrated in a study by Galynska and Bilous (2022), who also discuss the efficiency of distance learning in higher education.

Baklazhenko and Kornieva (2023) compare online or blended teaching English as a foreign language during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. They come to the conclusion that the blended teaching and learning format is most effective and beneficial for both teachers and students in tertiary education. Matviichuk et al. (2022) delve into the possibilities of organization of the tertiary educational process within the frame of e-learning. They also look into students' attitudes to the educational process in a time of war.

Students' attitudes to e-learning were also investigated by Budnyk et al. (2022). The authors presented it as a large-scale innovation. In addition, they characterized e-books and electronic teaching aids as useful tools in the teaching process.

We have found a study that deals with the influences of online learning on students and teachers (Opanasenko & Novikova, 2023), while Kurapov et al. (2023) write about the influences of the war on both students and teachers. They have concluded that the negative effects of war can be "associated with mental health, fear, stress, loneliness, burnout, and other related conditions" (p. 167).

Finally, Antoniuk (2023) speaks about the risks and losses in Ukrainian higher educational institutions that are experienced due to the war, referring to issues of security and preservation of infrastructure, human resources, and student body of the educational institutions.

As the above overview shows, a large number of studies analyse and discuss the tertiary educational process in Ukraine during martial law. However, very few look into students' attitudes towards the learning process. Moreover, we have found hardly any that consider students' attitudes towards the ongoing war itself and its psychological impacts on them. Thus, the rationale for conducting our survey is to fill in the gap in the academic literature on this issue and provide empirical data from objective analysis.

Therefore, the main **purpose** of the research was to obtain relevant information about our students' feelings and attitudes towards the war. Getting deep insights into the

issue was believed to enable us teachers to help students better process the difficult situation they had been living in, for we firmly believe that it is our responsibility to develop measures to stimulate students' self-organization and psychological support.

Thus, the present study aimed to reveal answers to the following concrete research questions:

1. What are the students' views concerning the outcomes of the war?
2. How do students keep informed about the war news?
3. How do students feel when hearing the war news?
4. What are the students' beliefs in relation to the future of their motherland?

METHODOLOGY

In addition to the theoretical analysis of the academic literature on the topic, we applied the quantitative research methodology and compiled a questionnaire to collect empirical data for the survey. In addition to gathering demographic information about the respondents, our online questionnaire contained three main blocks of Likert-scale questions, each of which was devoted to one major issue connected to the war. In this paper, the answers to the questions of Block 1 (General Attitudes) will be discussed.

We intended not to traumatize the psyche of our students and therefore tried to formulate our statements in a rather positive way. The questions inquired about the students' feelings about and attitudes to the Russian-Ukrainian war, about where they obtained information about the war from, and their hopes and beliefs in relation to the future of Transcarpathia.

Participants

Altogether 194 BA and MA students (among them 47 [24.2%] male and 147 [75.8%] female participants) completed and returned the questionnaire. The number of students by the age is presented in Table 1. The proportion of students studying in the daytime and the correspondence training forms was as follows: 114 (58.7%) daytime students, 64 (33%) correspondence students, and 16 (8.3%) studying in both training forms. A significant number of students (128 [66%]) stayed in Transcarpathia, whereas 24 (12.4%) students lived abroad and 42 (21.6%) students stayed partly in Transcarpathia and partly abroad.

Table 1

Age and Number of Research Participants

Age (years)	Number of students	Percentage (%)
17–18	44	22.7
19–20	87	44.8
21–22	31	16
23–24	7	3.6
Above 24	25	12.9
TOTAL	194	100

Procedure

The respondents completed the questionnaire online on the Google Forms platform in February – April 2023. They had to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 how much they agreed with the proposed statements, where 1 meant 'Strongly disagree' and 5 meant 'Strongly agree', with a neutral option of 3 meaning 'Neither agree, nor disagree'. After clearing the data, descriptive statistics were calculated with means and standard deviations to get a clear picture of the student attitudes in question.

RESULTS

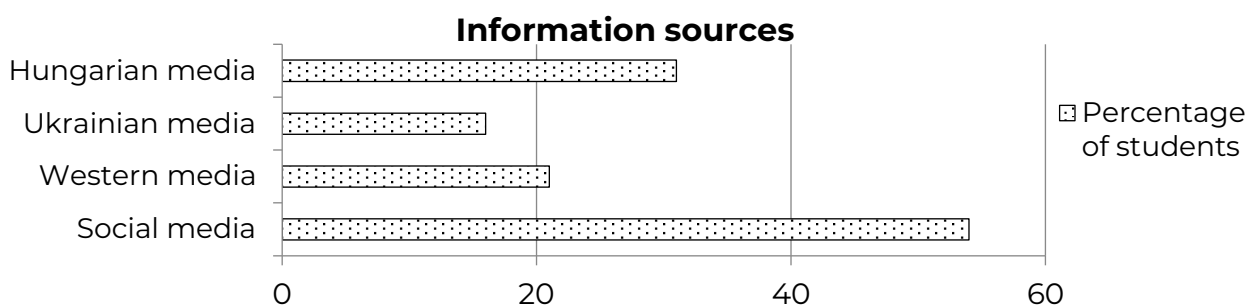
Block 1 of the questionnaire contained questions focusing on the students' general attitude towards and feelings about the Russian-Ukrainian war. We wanted to understand whether our students were optimistic or pessimistic regarding the situation in the country. We formulated our questions in both positive and negative forms, with positive statements prevailing. Students were concerned about the outcomes of the war, as 62% of them were very worried and 13% were worried. An indecisive answer was given by 18% of respondents. Only 5% of students declared that the outcomes did not worry them, while 2% stated that they were completely indifferent (mean [M] = 4.29, standard deviation [SD] = 0.88).

We inquired about how informed our students were about the happenings related to the military operations in the country. About 38% of respondents did not follow the latest news about the war on a daily basis. A somewhat lower percentage of students (34%) claimed they listened to or read the news about the war every day, while 28% gave a neutral answer, referring to the fact that they sometimes followed the news, other times they did not (M = 2.99, SD = 1.07).

We asked about the sources of their information about the war. We were interested in what ratio our students were informed from social media, through official Ukrainian TV and radio, through Western media (e.g., German, American, or British), and Hungarian media. Fifty-four percent of students followed the war news on social media (M = 3.66, SD = 1.05). Hungarian media reporting on war news were actively followed by 31% of students (M = 2.69, SD = 1.27), whereas the official Ukrainian media were followed by only 21% of students (M = 2.39, SD = 1.20). The least popular among our students were the Western media, as only 16% of the students watched, listened to, or read them (M = 2.11, SD = 1.09). The remaining students were indifferent or paid no attention to the war happenings. Figure 1 shows the most popular information sources and the percentage of students who preferred them.

Figure 1

The Most Popular Information Sources Among Students



When asked about the end of the war, 82% of students were optimistic. They hoped the war would end soon. Only 7% of respondents were pessimistic about when the war would end, while 11% were indecisive in relation to this question ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.77$). Concerning whether the pre-war conditions would be soon restored in Ukraine, students were less optimistic, as 51% answered positively. A negative response was given by 30% of the students, that is, they did not believe that the pre-war order could be restored in the country. A neutral answer was given by 19% of students ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.33$).

In this part of the questionnaire, we wanted to ascertain the students' views on the sad events and consequences of the war. Every day we hear tragic news about the deaths of young people, a great many of whom are our kin from Transcarpathia; thus, 79% of respondents were deeply saddened by these facts, 11% were distressed by the news of these tragedies, 8% could not give a clear opinion, and only 1% of students were not saddened and another 1% were not at all concerned about these issues ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.55$). There was a divide in the responses to hearing war news: 5% were not at all concerned by sad news, 6% were partly interested, 20% could not formulate their clear opinion, 16% were saddened by daily war news, and more than half (53%) of the students were deeply saddened by it ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.99$).

Three quarters (74%) of respondents were confident that wise decisions would be taken in the near future to end the war as soon as possible, 12% were mostly confident, 9% were uncertain, 3% were not particularly confident, and 2% did not believe that decision-makers would find the optimal solution to end the war in the near future ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.70$).

The prosperity of our region was absolutely doubted by 5% of the respondents, 12% were somewhat optimistic, and almost a quarter could not take a position, while 22% tried to hope in a better future for Transcarpathia, 35% of students were convinced that our homeland had a prosperous future and that development would come without delay ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.04$).

In the last two decades, power outages in our region were rare. The majority of students participating in our research project grew up with secure electricity. However, in 2022 drastic blackouts occurred in Transcarpathia, impacting all spheres of life. Nonetheless, presumably taking into account the experience so far, almost half of respondents (45%) were confident that power outages would cease when the war was over, 29% were optimistic, 17% could not or did not dare take a position, only a few (6%) were trying to be optimistic, while 3% of respondents did not believe that there would be permanent electricity supply ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 0.82$).

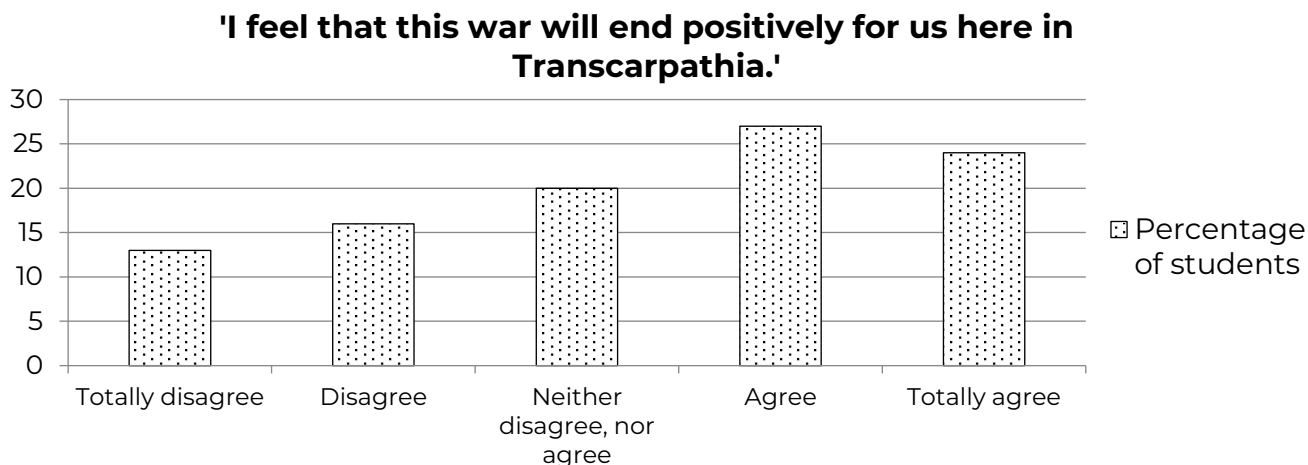
The statement "I believe that we do not have to wait much longer for peace" was reacted to differently by the respondents: 12% did not believe the war would end soon, 23% were trying to be optimistic, more than a quarter (30%) could not take a position, while 14% were trying to be hopeful and only 21% expressed true optimism ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.04$).

Respondents were evenly divided in their opinion about whether the war in Transcarpathia would end positively. Nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) believed that their homeland would prosper, with a similar proportion (27%) who could not give a clear answer, slightly fewer (20%) were optimistic, while 16% considered the

statement to be somewhat correct and 13% did not consider it relevant ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.13$). The results from the questionnaire concerning the future of Transcarpathia are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Student Beliefs and Hopes About the Future of Transcarpathia



More than half of respondents agreed with the Latin saying ‘Dum spiro spero’ (Hope dies last, or While I live, I hope), 13% of respondents were mostly sanguine. Less than a quarter of respondents expressed uncertainty (21%), while the proportion of those who gave a negative answer and those who did not support the statement was similar (5% and 6%, respectively) ($M = 4.07, SD = 1.02$). Table 2 summarises the overall findings.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

		M	SD	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1	The outcome of the war in Ukraine worries me.	4.29	0.88	2	5	18	13	62
2	Every day I follow the latest news about the war.	2.99	1.07	15	23	28	15	19
3	I keep myself informed about the war through social media.	3.66	1.05	7	9	30	21	33
4	I keep myself informed about the war through official Ukrainian TV and radio.	2.39	1.20	38	18	23	8	13
5	I keep myself informed about the war through Eastern media (e.g., German, American, English).	2.11	1.09	47	16	21	11	5
6	I am informed about the war through the media in Hungary.	2.69	1.27	30	16	23	16	15
7	I hope that the war will end soon.	4.46	0.77	3	4	11	10	72

8	I believe that the pre-war order in Ukraine will be restored soon.	3.43	1.33	15	15	19	13	38
9	I am saddened by the news about young people who have lost their lives in the war.	4.66	0.55	1	1	8	11	79
10	I am saddened by the daily war news.	4.06	0.99	5	6	20	16	53
11	I hope that wise decisions will soon be taken to end the war as soon as possible.	4.52	0.70	2	3	9	12	74
12	I am optimistic that Transcarpathia will flourish again.	3.72	1.04	5	12	26	22	35
13	In my opinion, once the war is over, the power outages will also cease.	4.92	0.82	3	6	17	29	45
14	I believe that we do not have to wait much longer for peace.	3.08	1.04	12	23	30	14	21
15	I feel that this war will end positively for us here in Transcarpathia.	3.26	1.13	13	16	27	20	24
16	I believe that 'hope dies last'.	4.07	1.02	5	6	21	13	55

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree, nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree; *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation)

DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the online questionnaires are organized around the four main questions that our investigation intended to answer.

- *What are the students' views concerning the outcomes of the war?*

The findings show that three-thirds of our research participants were concerned with the outcome of the war and that it worried them greatly. This reaction is not unexpected in the present situation in the country. An overwhelming majority of students indicated their hopes for the war to end soon. This proves how eager the students were to live in peace again in their own country. However, this hopeful attitude of the students was not reflected in the responses when asked about their views on how long they will have to wait for peace in the country, because true optimism was shown only by a little more than a third of the respondents. Here students demonstrated some pessimism. The means of statements (1, 7, 11, 13, 14) providing answers to Research Question 1 were high, mostly above 4, proving that students in general were positive, enthusiastic, and hopeful about the outcomes of the war, which is also supported by the low standard deviation values.

- *How do students keep informed about the war news?*

It is crucial to learn about daily news about what is happening in Ukraine, to keep informed and up to date about the events concerning the ongoing war so that we can be prepared for everything in time. Therefore, it is surprising that only a third of

respondents claimed they followed the news from the war front on a daily basis. This might be explained by many students being more concerned about their studies than anything else.

In addition, a self-protecting mechanism might have worked in the students to save them from even hearing the horrors from the war. Various media interpret the events diversely. In the digital age, it is easy to get information on this or that issue. Moreover, social media are very popular among young people nowadays, and they definitely play a crucial role in the life of students; therefore, it is not surprising that students were primarily informed about war news on social media. The highest mean (3.66) among the responses to statements 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 aiming at answering Research Question 2 also proves the wide popularity of social media among our student population as an information channel.

– *How do students feel when hearing the war news?*

We come across the war news everywhere whether we want it or not: in radio and TV news bulletins, in newspapers, and on the internet. Every day, we hear and see news stories of soldiers who heroically defended their country and gave their lives for it. Often these soldiers were the same age as our students. Therefore, it is understandable why an extremely high ratio of students were saddened to hear such tragic news. Statements 9 and 10 were intended to collect data to answer Research Question 3, and the means of both were above the value of 4, proving that students felt distressed because of the war news. Those very few students who claimed they were not concerned about the war news and the tragic death of defenders of the homeland simply showed indifference to a question of great significance.

– *What are the students' beliefs concerning the future of their motherland?*

In general, students were optimistic and hopeful about the future of their country and Transcarpathia in particular. A great many students believed that the war would end soon and that the stakeholders would make wise decisions to help the country overcome the difficulties. Approximately a year after the outbreak of the war, our student respondents were still very positive about the outcomes of the war and were brave to claim that their homeland would prosper after the conclusion of this horror.

This was supported by the majority of participants who declared that 'Dum spiro, spero', or 'While I live, I hope'. The mean values above 3 among the answers to the statements 8, 12, 15, and 16 aiming to answer Research Question 4 prove that our respondents were rather optimistic about this question.

– *Implications of the findings*

Our research findings refer to the following pedagogical implications:

1. Teachers need to help students process the difficult situation they have been living in.
2. Teachers need to develop methods and means for providing psychological support for students.
3. Teachers need to develop measures to stimulate students' self-organization.

As a next phase in our investigation of the war effects on tertiary students' educational processes, a cross-sectional study will trace the alteration of student attitudes towards the war in Ukraine. The findings will be compared and contrasted with previous results. Another possible research direction may investigate what impact the experience of the war has had on students' academic achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings we have come to the conclusion that our students were deeply concerned with the possible outcomes of the war. Although some students showed a pessimistic attitude, most of them expressed their hope and optimism towards the future of the homeland.

In the course of our survey, the importance and influential role of social media were emphasized as the students kept informed about the war news primarily via these means of information, which are one of the most popular channels of information among young people. The daily news from the front line of the war shocked the students. Nevertheless, they tried to be optimistic and hopeful as to the outcomes of the war and the future prosperity of the country.

Nobody is in the know about when the war will end and peace will come to us. One thing is certain: we must be optimistic about the future and trust that everything will turn out well. We have to nurture this confidence in our students, too, because as the Latin proverb says, 'While I live, I hope'.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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АНОТАЦІЯ / ABSTRACT [in Ukrainian]:

СТАВЛЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ДО ВІЙНИ В УКРАЇНІ

Мета. Дослідження проводилось в одному з регіонів України, де з 24 лютого 2022 року не ведуться безпосередні бойові дії. Однак ми живемо в умовах жакливої війни, яка й надалі триває, з регулярними повітряними тривогами, що негативно впливають на людей і спричиняють важке психічне навантаження: невпевненість, тривогу,

злість, відчай, зневіру, розчарування, безнадійність. Таким чином, основною метою нашого опитування було глибше зрозуміти почуття і ставлення здобувачів вищої освіти нашого закладу до війни для того, щоб допомогти їм впоратися з ситуацією, в якій вони опинилися.

Методологія. У дослідженні застосовано кількісний метод дослідження. В якості знаряддя дослідження розроблено онлайн-анкету з використанням Google Forms з шістнадцятьма питаннями типу шкали Лайкерта. Опитування проводилося у форматі онлайн серед здобувачів закладу вищої освіти віком від 17 до 24 років, які навчаються на сімнадцяти різних спеціальностях. Загалом було заповнено 194 анкети протягом лютого-квітня 2023 року. Описову статистику використано з метою чіткого і стислого узагальнення даних, що дозволило отримати глибше розуміння основної теми, а також зрозуміти закономірності, що впливають із цих даних.

Результати. Результати дослідження показали, що студентів найбільше турбують наслідки війни. Вони досить поінформовані про хід війни, хоча близько третини респондентів стверджували, що не слідкують за щоденними новинами про ситуацію в державі. Переважна більшість учасників дослідження були оптимістично налаштовані навесні 2023 року щодо швидкого та позитивного завершення війни. На противагу цьому, лише близько третини студентів були абсолютно позитивно налаштовані щодо майбутнього своєї рідної країни після закінчення війни.

Висновки. У цілому можна зазначити, що переважна більшість респондентів оптимістично налаштовані щодо майбутнього. Початковий оптимізм респондентів стосовно наслідків війни за цей час очевидно змінився. Тому в якості подальшого напрямку дослідження заплановано проведення дослідження поперечного перерізу, в якому ми могли б простежити зміни у ставленні наших студентів до наслідків війни в Україні та зіставити їх з попередніми результатами.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: війна в Україні, дистанційне навчання, Закарпаття, онлайн навчання, ставлення студентів до війни, студенти закладу вищої освіти.

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