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UKRAINE'S HIGHER EDUCATION CHALLENGES AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Introduction. Higher education is a fundamental driver of individual mobility and societal development. However, Ukraine's system has faced persistent systemic constraints since the mid-1990s socioeconomic transition. The post-Soviet economic collapse precipitated a corresponding deterioration in higher education institutions, manifested through incomplete reforms, significant faculty attrition, and declining academic standards. These structural deficiencies have resulted in graduates lacking the competencies required in global labor markets despite Ukraine's ongoing efforts to harmonize with European educational frameworks [1].

The work aims to analyze the differences between Ukrainian and European higher education systems, highlighting Ukraine's systemic challenges and the need for reforms to align with EU standards that prioritize employability, critical thinking, and international competitiveness.

The professional preparedness of graduates remains a critical concern in higher education. Current systemic shortcomings frequently result in diploma holders lacking the qualifications for their chosen fields. This skills gap stems primarily from deficiencies in educational quality, variable knowledge acquisition among students, and inadequate oversight of learning processes and academic outcomes.

Naturally, foreigners are interested in obtaining education at Ukrainian universities. Ukraine is among the top ten countries in the world in terms of the total number of international students. Today, about 45 thousand citizens of other countries receive education in Ukraine, which constitutes 1% of the international market of educational services for foreigners. Traditional regions

from which people went to study in Ukraine are the People's Republic of China, Turkmenistan, India, Jordan, Syria, Iran, Morocco, and others (until 2022, as the situation in Ukraine has changed). In total, students from 130 countries receive higher education in Ukraine.

Post-Soviet countries' education systems and teaching methods differ significantly from European ones. Ukraine, which is striving to get closer to the EU, is increasingly introducing foreign experience. The European education system aims to help students gain knowledge and practical skills [2]. The Ukrainian system motivates them to get a high score.

Reforming the content of education is a response to today's challenges. The main goal is to prepare young people for adult life adequately. In the civic aspect, it is specified as preparation for life in a democratic society open to the world's people. Therefore, attention is focused not only on human rights and the principles of democracy but also on tolerance, which is necessary for life in a globalized world [3].

Introducing new disciplines is carried out depending on how broad the understanding of civic education is in a particular country. For example, in France, these are the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789", "Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948", "Democratic Institutions of France", and "The Role of France in the World". Norway has also introduced "Environmental Education" and "Cooperation among People".

Within the Ukrainian educational paradigm, formal certification (diploma attainment) is often equated with actual education. A student who has previously diligently studied the material at school and now prepares well and passes the sessions is considered an educated person with a specific idea of his way of life. However, studying at European universities also prepares educated people, but of a slightly different type. These people have creative thinking in solving specific issues or problems, have experience and knowledge in their field of activity, and boldly make responsible decisions. A Western university graduate quickly builds a career and finds his place in life [1].

The gap between Ukrainian and foreign schools shows up in practical ways – like food services, daily schedules, and hands-on learning.

Breaks. In Ukraine, a long break usually lasts 30 minutes. In Germany, it lasts a whole hour. In France, it lasts as long as an hour and a half. Schoolchildren can not only have a leisurely lunch but also, for example, play football or tennis. In France, they even attend clubs during breaks. There is much practice in physics and chemistry lessons. While Ukraine often lacks sufficient hands-on practice because of equipment shortages, it is a fundamental part of physics and chemistry classes in Germany. Various experiments are conducted there so students can understand how everything works without formulas. In addition, the lessons are engaging, and the children are not bored [3].

Nutrition. *Food of choice*. In Germany, parents can register on the appropriate website and create a menu for their children, taking into account their characteristics. In France, they emphasize the importance of many vegetables in food. In Poland, fruits and yogurts are always on the menu. However, French fries or hamburgers may also be available. In Ukraine, the dishes in the canteens are very similar and not always tasty.

Poland attracts Ukrainian students due to its geographical proximity, shared culture, and affordable tuition. Therefore, education in our country is quite different, even though they are neighboring countries. In Poland, teachers hold weekly consultations for students lagging in learning or wanting to improve their grades in a particular subject. Everyone has the opportunity to attend a consultation. Students who are dissatisfied with the teaching methodology can attend a class with another teacher. Therefore, students rarely need tutoring services.

In Ukraine, the situation is entirely different. We also provide consultations and additional classes, but for some reason, students often need the services of tutors [2]. The main feature of Polish schools is that the attendance and performance record system is electronic. It is a very convenient means of

communication between children, parents, and teachers. That is, there is information for both students and their parents about their success and details of their studies.

Both countries, Ukraine and Poland, have their advantages and challenges when it comes to higher education. Ukraine offers a more affordable education that allows a person to stay in their native environment while maintaining a connection with the family. Conversely, Poland provides an opportunity to obtain a European diploma and build a career in the EU countries. It is important to make the choice that best suits one's goals, ambitions, and capabilities.

In the countries of the European Union, considerable attention is paid to classroom equipment, and learning partly takes place on unique online platforms. For example, the British school is modern and well-equipped. Students have the opportunity to learn to play the piano and tennis, and also practice writing detective novels, which significantly develops the child as a person [3]. Children can find a hobby that they like. In Ukraine, classes that include in-depth study of one of the subjects remain popular. However, in many European countries, there may be more different disciplines, some of which are combined. For example, the number of subjects in Spain is much smaller than in a Ukrainian school. In this system, language and literature are merged into one subject, similar to how geography and history are combined. The first-year biology curriculum covers human biology, including body structure and systems, along with other fundamental biological concepts. There is also such a subject as technology – something like our labor training. However, the class is not divided into boys and girls. In Spain, the Netherlands, and Great Britain, children are not divided into boys and girls in labor training lessons or other subjects. However, there is a division into stronger and weaker groups or classes.

Conclusion. While Ukraine's education system retains strengths like affordability and cultural continuity, its alignment with European standards demands urgent reforms – prioritizing practical competencies, modernized

infrastructure, and outcome-based evaluation to cultivate globally competitive graduates.

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