

UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION INTO THE EURASIAN EDUCATIONAL SPACE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Annotation. *The issue of Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian educational space has acquired new urgency in the context of global educational transformation, geopolitical instability, digital restructuring of higher education, and reconfiguration of international academic cooperation. This section examines the prospects, limitations, and strategic implications of Ukraine's engagement with the Eurasian educational macroregion, understood not as a narrowly political bloc but as a heterogeneous transregional environment of academic exchange, institutional interconnection, historical heritage, and emerging educational networks across Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and parts of Asia. The purpose of the work is to identify the main challenges and opportunities associated with Ukraine's integration into this broader educational space, and to identify the conditions under which such integration can serve the national interests of educational modernization, scientific development, and post-war reconstruction.*

Methodologically, the study is based on a qualitative conceptual analysis, comparative interpretation, and problem-oriented synthesis of academic research in the field of higher education, comparative education, and internationalization studies. The analytical framework combines five interrelated dimensions: normative-institutional compatibility, academic mobility, research collaboration, digital-technological connectivity, and socio-political and security constraints. Particular attention has been paid to the contradiction between Ukraine's European educational orientation and its historically established ties to broader Eurasian academic networks. Rather than viewing these vectors as completely incompatible, the chapter

argues for a differentiated interpretation of educational integration based on strategic selectivity, institutional sovereignty, and value-based internationalization.

The study demonstrates that Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian educational space is characterized by both significant risks and significant opportunities. The most important challenges include geopolitical divides, security threats, regulatory divergence in quality assurance systems, funding shortages, institutional asymmetries, brain drain, fragmented connections between education, science, and innovation, as well as unresolved issues of language, identity, and symbolic decolonization. At the same time, the section identifies a number of opportunities that can enhance Ukraine's educational resilience and competitiveness. These include expanded access to transregional academic and research networks, diversified education markets, digital forms of internationalization, hybrid mobility, joint curriculum development, post-conflict institutional renewal, and strengthening regional expertise in strategically important areas.

The scientific novelty of the chapter lies in its reinterpretation of the Eurasian educational space as a plural, multi-layered and non-exclusive field of interaction, rather than as a monolithic geopolitical project. This allows to assess Ukraine's educational prospects beyond reductionist political binaries and to formulate a balanced approach in which European compatibility remains the normative framework, while broader regional cooperation is pursued selectively and pragmatically. The practical significance of the study lies in its relevance for educational policy, university internationalization strategies, academic diplomacy and the development of post-war reconstruction measures in the field of higher education. It has been discussed that Ukraine's future role in the broader educational macro-region will depend on its ability to combine openness with caution, mobility with restraint, modernization with identity, and international cooperation with the protection of academic autonomy and national sustainability.

Keywords: *Ukraine, Eurasian educational space, higher education, educational integration, internationalization, academic mobility, digitalization, post-war reconstruction, educational policy, regional cooperation.*

우크라이나의 유라시아 교육 공간 통합: 도전과 기회

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주석. 세계 교육 변혁, 지정학적 불안정, 고등 교육의 디지털 재편, 그리고 국제 학술 협력의 재편이라는 맥락에서 우크라이나의 유라시아 교육 공간 통합 문제는 새로운 시급성을 띠고 있습니다. 이 섹션에서는 우크라이나가 유라시아 교육 거시권에 참여하는 데 따른 전망, 한계, 그리고 전략적 함의를 살펴봅니다. 여기서 유라시아 교육 거시권은 좁은 의미의 정치적 블록이 아니라 동유럽, 중앙아시아, 그리고 아시아 일부 지역에 걸쳐 있는 이질적인 초지역적 학술 교류, 제도적 연계, 역사적 유산, 그리고 새롭게 부상하는 교육 네트워크의 환경으로 이해됩니다. 본 연구의 목적은 우크라이나가 이러한 광범위한 교육 공간에 통합되는 과정에서 발생하는 주요 과제와 기회를 파악하고, 그러한 통합이 교육 현대화, 과학 발전, 그리고 전후 재건이라는 국가적 이익에 어떻게 기여할 수 있는지의 조건을 규명하는 것입니다.

방법론적으로, 본 연구는 고등 교육, 비교 교육, 그리고 국제화 연구 분야의 학술 연구에 대한 질적 개념 분석, 비교 해석, 그리고 문제 중심적 종합을 기반으로 합니다. 이 분석 틀은 규범적·제도적 호환성, 학술적 이동성, 연구 협력, 디지털 기술 연결성, 사회정치적 및 안보적 제약이라는 다섯 가지 상호 연관된 차원을 결합합니다. 특히 우크라이나의 유럽 교육 지향성과 역사적으로 확립된 광범위한 유라시아 학술 네트워크와의 관계 사이의 모순에 주목했습니다. 이 장에서는 이러한 두 가지 방향을 완전히 양립 불가능한 것으로 보는 대신, 전략적 선택성, 제도적 주권, 가치 기반 국제화를 바탕으로 교육 통합에 대한 차별화된 해석을 제시합니다.

이 연구는 우크라이나의 유라시아 교육 공간 통합이 상당한 위험과 상당한 기회를 동시에 내포하고 있음을 보여줍니다. 가장 중요한 과제로는 지정학적 분열, 안보 위협, 품질 보증 시스템의 규제 차이, 자금 부족, 제도적 비대칭성, 인재 유출, 교육, 과학 및 혁신 간의 단절된 연결, 그리고 언어, 정체성 및 상징적 탈식민화와 관련된 미해결 문제 등이 있습니다. 동시에 이 장에서는 우크라이나 교육의

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키워드: 우크라이나, 유라시아 교육 공간, 고등 교육, 교육 통합, 국제화, 학술 이동성, 디지털화, 전후 재건, 교육 정책, 지역 협력.

Introduction. In today's world, higher education systems are increasingly shaped by forces that transcend national borders. Globalization, regionalization, digital transformation, migration, geopolitical competition, and the rise of the knowledge economy have fundamentally changed the structure and functions of education. Universities now operate in a dense transnational environment, where academic mobility, collaborative research, quality assurance mechanisms, recognition of qualifications, online learning platforms, and international partnerships play a central role. Under these conditions, no national education system can remain completely isolated if it aspires to be competitive, innovative, and socially relevant. Ukraine is no exception. Its higher education system has been constantly transforming since independence, and the question of its place in the broader international and regional educational space remains strategically important.

Most analyses of Ukraine's educational development are, understandably, focused on the European vector. The country's participation in the Bologna Process, efforts to align with the European

Higher Education Area, quality assurance reforms, and attempts to modernize governance structures position European integration as the dominant orientation in Ukraine's higher education policy (Keeling, 2006; Ravinet, 2008; Lugovyi et al., 2025). However, Ukraine's educational interactions are not limited to the European dimension. Historically, linguistically, institutionally, and academically, Ukraine has also been connected to a much broader transregional environment, often described with various meanings as the Eurasian Educational Space. This space includes not only post-Soviet educational ties, but also broader patterns of scientific, academic, and institutional cooperation in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and parts of Asia.

The concept of the Eurasian Educational Space is analytically complex. It should not be reduced to a rigid geopolitical formula or interpreted as a single institutional block with clearly defined boundaries. Rather, it can be understood as a multi-layered field of educational interaction, shaped by shared historical heritage, past institutional interoperability, overlapping professional cultures, student and faculty mobility, and new forms of digital and research collaboration. In this sense, the Eurasian Educational Space is both inherited and evolving. It includes old academic routes and new transregional opportunities; it contains both cooperation and competition; and it is deeply influenced by broader political developments, including conflicts, sanctions, security concerns, and shifting international alliances.

For Ukraine, the issue of integration into this wider space is particularly sensitive. On the one hand, regional educational connectivity can create opportunities for broader academic cooperation, access to additional markets, diversified research networks, and a stronger positioning in new knowledge corridors between Europe and Asia. On the other hand, contemporary geopolitical realities, especially those shaped by war, occupation, and the imperative of national security, significantly complicate any discussion of regional integration. The question is therefore not whether Ukraine should "choose" Eurasia over Europe. Such a formulation is conceptually simplistic and strategically misleading. The real question is how Ukraine can define its own model of educational openness: one that is compatible with European commitments, attentive to national sovereignty, responsive to security constraints, and at the same time flexible enough to participate

in broader transregional academic processes where such interaction is beneficial.

This topic has become even more relevant in the context of the destruction and disruption caused by the war. Ukrainian universities have been forced to adapt to displacement, damaged infrastructure, lack of resources, and the psychological burden borne by students and faculty. At the same time, these pressures have accelerated certain transformations, including the digitalization of learning, the internationalization of support networks, and the emergence of new forms of hybrid academic collaboration. In this regard, the crisis has revealed both the fragility and adaptive potential of Ukrainian higher education. Issues of international integration are no longer purely developmental; they are also related to the resilience, continuity, reconstruction, and survival of the state.

Moreover, the broader architecture of higher education worldwide is becoming more polycentric. Europe remains an important reference frame, but it is no longer the sole center of educational weight. Asian universities are gaining in importance, regional educational hubs are multiplying, and new forms of internationalization are developing through digital platforms, joint research infrastructures, and thematic consortia. Ukraine's education strategy must therefore take into account the fact that international higher education is becoming increasingly networked, multi-directional, and competitive. The ability to participate in such an environment requires more than formal political declarations; it requires institutional adaptability, managerial capacity, research capacity, and strategic clarity.

Thus, the issue of Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian educational space is viewed through the prism of both challenges and opportunities. The central argument is that such integration should be understood not as a binary geopolitical alternative, but as a selective and multi-level process of academic, institutional, and technological interaction. Its value depends on the conditions under which it is implemented, the guarantees that accompany it, and the degree to which it contributes to the modernization of education and the international competitiveness of Ukraine. The study of this issue is aimed at understanding what types of cooperation can be beneficial, what risks should be avoided, and what strategic principles should guide political and institutional decision-making.

The purpose of the study: to conceptualize the Eurasian Educational Space as an analytical category relevant to the development of higher education in Ukraine; to review relevant research on educational regionalization, post-Soviet transformation, and internationalization of higher education; to outline a methodological framework for assessing the prospects for integration in a multidimensional manner; to identify the main challenges and opportunities that shape Ukraine's possible interaction with the broader educational macro-region; to promote a more differentiated and politically relevant understanding of Ukraine's educational future in a changing international environment.

Literature Review. The issue of educational integration has attracted ongoing academic attention in the context of globalization, regionalization, and the transformation of higher education governance. Scholars have examined how states and institutions reposition themselves within transnational educational architectures, how regional educational spaces emerge, and how universities respond to external norms, mobility pressures, and global competition. Ukraine occupies a particularly illustrative place in this broader field, as the development of its higher education has been shaped simultaneously by post-socialist transformation, Europeanization, and the legacy of long-standing academic relationships in the wider Eurasian region.

A fundamental distinction in the literature is that between internationalization and regionalization. Knight (2013) argues that internationalization, in a broad sense, refers to the process by which the teaching, research, and service functions of higher education acquire an international, intercultural, or global dimension. Regionalization, by contrast, refers to geographically concentrated and often more structured forms of educational cooperation. This distinction is particularly useful for this topic, as it helps to avoid treating all cross-border educational activities as homogeneous. Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space cannot be reduced to a general internationalization; it includes specific regional patterns shaped by geography, history, and institutional heritage.

Much of the literature on regional educational integration focuses on Europe, particularly the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area. Keeling (2006) interprets the Bologna Process not only as an agenda for technical reforms, but also as a discursive

project through which the European Commission expanded its role in higher education. Ravine (2008) further shows how initially voluntary commitments gradually evolved into a stronger regime of controlled coordination, creating a sense of binding commitment among participating states. This research provides insight into how regional educational spaces can be constructed through a combination of political vision, soft governance, the diffusion of norms and institutional standardization.

For Ukraine, the European model has had a strong normative influence. Ukrainian scholars have repeatedly emphasized that the modernization of higher education in the country has been largely shaped by reforms associated with the Bologna Process, including the restructuring of study cycles, the development of quality assurance mechanisms, the updating of curricula, and attempts to facilitate academic mobility (Lugovyi et al., 2025). However, the literature also demonstrates that the transfer of European norms to the post-socialist context is neither linear nor seamless. Reforms often unfold through selective adaptation, institutional imitation, bureaucratic formalism, and uneven implementation. This makes the Ukrainian case particularly important for understanding how external educational models are reinterpreted in transitional conditions.

The theme of global educational spheres is central to Marginson's (2008) work, which conceptualizes higher education as embedded in global relational structures rather than confined within nation-states. This relational perspective is particularly useful for analyzing the Eurasian educational space. If educational systems are shaped by flows of people, ideas, standards, and institutional practices, then regional integration should not be understood solely through formal interstate organizations. It also includes informal academic networks, publication cultures, mobility routes, digital ecosystems, and disciplinary communities. Ukraine participates in such relational spaces simultaneously at several levels: national, European, post-Soviet, global, and digital.

Research on global regionalism and higher education further supports this view. Robertson et al. (2016) argue that regional educational spaces are not simply scaled-down versions of globalization. They are politically constructed, historically conditioned, and often characterized by uneven power relations. Regional projects can enable cooperation, but they

can also reproduce hierarchy, dependence, or competition between core and peripheral institutions. This caveat is very relevant when discussing Ukraine's broader educational integration. Any participation in the Eurasian educational system must be assessed not only in terms of opportunities, but also in terms of asymmetry, influence, and institutional autonomy.

One of the current areas of research is the internationalization of higher education in relation to the former Soviet countries. Chankseiani (2018) identifies four justifications for the internationalization of higher education and shows how universities in the UK perceive students from the former Soviet republics through different prisms, including economic, academic, geopolitical and cultural considerations. This work illustrates that post-Soviet educational trajectories continue to matter in international recruitment and collaboration practices. It also suggests that Ukraine's position in the wider educational sphere is interpreted externally through regionally coded categories, even as the country seeks to reinvent itself through European integration and sovereign modernization.

The scholars' researches also highlight the topic of the internationalization of higher education in Ukraine. Thus, Zakharchuk (2024) characterizes internationalization in Ukraine as dynamic but constrained by limited funding, weak infrastructure, and uneven institutional commitment. Kvit (2020) discusses higher education in Ukraine during a systemic transformation, drawing attention to structural reforms, changes in governance, and the broader political context of educational development. Together, these studies show that Ukraine's international educational engagement has been real and expanding, but also fragmented and often institutionally undersupported. The problem is not a lack of internationalization, but the need for its strategic and sustainable deepening.

While many scholars focused on the analysis of national education reforms (Kostrobii & Rashkevych, 2017; Nikolaev, 2017; Sovsun, 2017; Wynnycky, 2015), little research has been conducted on how Ukrainian universities responded to internationalization. Furthermore, the very analysis of the institutional-level transformations lacked an empirical component and was predominantly grounded in literature reviews (Zakharchuk, 2024).

The role of mobility in higher education has also been widely studied. Teichler (2017) notes that international student mobility has changed in scope, purpose and institutional function. This is increasingly linked not only to intercultural learning, but also to labour market positioning, reputational competition and international strategies of universities. However, mobility is not inherently beneficial in all contexts. For countries experiencing economic difficulties or demographic decline, outward mobility can exacerbate brain drain. This duality is very relevant for Ukraine. Participation in transregional mobility networks can promote the development of skills and connections, but without mechanisms for return, retention and reintegration it can also weaken domestic academic potential.

An increasingly important area of research is the digital transformation in education. Williamson et al. (2020) show how the pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies and reimagined educational practices, governance, and pedagogy. While their analysis focuses on the coronavirus emergency, its broader implications extend far beyond the immediate context. Digital platforms, virtual exchange, remote collaboration, and hybrid educational formats have forever changed the structure of internationalization. For Ukraine, this transformation is of particular importance, as digitalization has become not only a tool for modernization but also a strategy for survival during wartime. As a result, digital internationalization is now one of the most promising avenues for selective integration into broader educational networks.

Ukrainian scholarly tradition has largely viewed educational integration through the lens of national modernization, Europeanization, and state policy reform. Kremen (2013) examines educational change in philosophical and strategic terms, emphasizing the need for nationally grounded modernization that is open to international influences but not limited to imitation. Lugovyi et al. (2025) identify priorities for reforming higher education in Ukraine, including quality assurance, management modernization, and compatibility with European developments. These contributions underscore an important principle: integration is not an end in itself, but a means to improve the quality of education, social efficiency, and scientific potential.

Recent Ukrainian scholarly thought increasingly focuses on the strategic role of higher education in ensuring national resilience,

post-crisis recovery, and state modernization. Kvit (2020) analyzed higher education in Ukraine as part of a broader systemic transformation and emphasized that educational reforms cannot be separated from the quality of governance, public trust, and democratic development. In a similar vein, Kremen (2013) noted that the philosophy of national education should be based on long-term civilizational and humanistic priorities, and not be reduced to the mechanical borrowing of external models. Such logic is particularly important for assessing Ukraine's integration into any broader educational space: successful international interaction should be selective, reflexive, and aligned with national development needs.

Numerous Ukrainian researchers have also analyzed the institutional architecture of higher education reforms, especially in relation to quality assurance, university rankings, scientific productivity, and public policy. Talanova (2010) has made a significant contribution to the study of quality assurance, institutional competitiveness, and the development of research universities in Ukraine. Her work emphasizes the structural importance of academic excellence policies, institutional differentiation of universities, and the need to integrate Ukrainian higher education into international evaluation systems without losing its local mission. These arguments are directly relevant to the topic of Eurasian educational integration, as they demonstrate that participation in regional networks is meaningful only when institutions have sufficient quality and strategic capacity.

The contemporary literature is also increasingly focusing on the issue of academic losses and displacement caused by war. Although this area is still emerging, existing research suggests that educational displacement, interrupted doctoral studies, destroyed infrastructure, and migration of scholars can have long-term structural consequences for countries experiencing conflict. For Ukraine, this means that educational integration should be seen not only as a matter of prestige or modernization, but also as a mechanism for restoring, maintaining, and reproducing intellectual potential. In this context, the notion of academic circulation becomes more relevant, rather than simply expanding mobility. The key challenge is to ensure that international openness supports reconstruction rather than deepening dependency.

Finally, contemporary research suggests that the future of higher education is increasingly linked to hybrid models that combine territorial,

digital, institutional, and networked forms of interaction. Therefore, Ukraine's participation in the Eurasian educational space should not be interpreted through outdated notions of rigid blocs or exclusively physical exchange. A more productive approach is to analyze how Ukrainian universities can join selective transregional networks of knowledge, innovation, and digital collaboration, while maintaining regulatory coherence with European standards and protecting national educational sovereignty.

At the same time, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the exact meaning of Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian educational space under modern conditions. Previous frameworks often envisioned a more continuous field of post-Soviet academic engagement than what currently exists. They did not fully anticipate the extent to which geopolitical disruption, military aggression, symbolic decolonization, and security concerns would transform the practical and ethical foundations of educational cooperation. As a result, there is a need for renewed conceptual work able to distinguish between different levels of regional educational connectivity: legacy compatibility, functional academic collaboration, digital exchange, academic collaboration with Asian partners, and politically problematic institutional connections.

Thus, it is worth considering the Eurasian educational space as a wide and heterogeneous macro-regional field, and not as a single institutional entity. After all, first of all, educational integration is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to formal agreements. Second, regional spaces are constructed through both policy and practice. Thirdly, the educational system of Ukraine is formed by overlapping vectors, and not by a single trajectory. Fourth, the benefits of integration depend on the quality of governance, institutional capacity, and strategic selectivity. Fifth, in the current context, any discussion of regional educational integration must take security, sovereignty and compatibility of values seriously.

Methodology. The study is based on a qualitative and analytical research design that combines conceptual interpretation, comparative analysis, and problem-oriented synthesis. This methodological approach is appropriate because the issues under study are not limited to measuring isolated empirical indicators. Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes institutional structures, regulatory systems, political constraints, research

opportunities, mobility practices, digital infrastructures, and cultural and symbolic factors. A complex problem of this kind requires a synthetic methodological framework capable of linking scholarly debates with strategic interpretation.

The first methodological component is conceptual analysis. The term “Eurasian Educational Space” is not self-evident and is used inconsistently in both academic and policy discourse. In some contexts, it refers to educational cooperation between post-Soviet countries; in others it is linked to larger civilizational or geopolitical narratives; in still others it is used in a broader transregional sense, encompassing interactions between Europe and Asia, educational corridors, research partnerships, and institutional connectivity across multiple subregions. The Eurasian educational space is thus defined in analytical rather than ideological terms: as a heterogeneous macro-regional field of higher education interaction shaped by historical connections, institutional legacies, mobility patterns, disciplinary communities, and emerging forms of digital and research collaboration in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and adjacent Asian contexts.

The second methodological component is comparative interpretation. The analysis examines the main dimensions of educational integration, as discussed in studies on internationalization, Europeanization, and regionalization. Rather than considering integration as a single process, the analysis divides it into several analytically distinct but interrelated dimensions. These dimensions serve as a basis for assessing both the challenges and opportunities facing Ukraine.

As part of the study, comparative analysis allowed to compare Ukraine’s integration into the Eurasian Educational Space along five main dimensions:

The normative-institutional dimension, which concerns the compatibility of degree structures, qualification frameworks, accreditation systems, quality assurance procedures, and governance models. It allows to assess whether educational systems can interact productively without creating systemic incoherence or reputational risk.

The academic mobility dimension, which includes student mobility, faculty exchanges, visiting fellowships, and professional circulation. It encompasses both the benefits of international presence and the risks of brain drain.

The research dimension, which focuses on opportunities for joint publications, joint projects, joint laboratories, innovation platforms, and participation in transnational knowledge production.

The digital-technological dimension, which addresses virtual mobility, digital pedagogy, learning management systems, distance collaboration tools, online certification, open educational resources, and hybrid models of internationalization.

The socio-political and security dimension, which addresses geopolitical constraints related to wars of destruction, issues of sovereignty, linguistic and identity politics, normative trust, and the impact of political regimes on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The third methodological component is a problem-oriented synthesis. Rather than assuming that integration is inherently beneficial or inherently dangerous, we view it as a strategic process whose outcomes depend on context, design, and governance. This avoids teleological thinking and provides a more balanced interpretation. In some dimensions, broader educational integration can create significant opportunities for modernization and sustainability. In others, it can lead to dependency, inequality, or security risks. The aim of the analysis is therefore to identify the conditions under which interaction becomes beneficial or problematic.

The empirical basis of the section consists of a synthesized corpus of secondary sources, including conceptual research in higher education, analytical works on education reform, and research on Ukraine's internationalization and regional educational positioning. The cited works were selected because they highlight the central components of the problem: educational regionalization, post-socialist transformation, academic mobility, global spheres of higher education, digitalization, and education reform in Ukraine.

The analysis is based on several methodological assumptions. First, educational integration is seen as non-linear. Progress in one area can coexist with setbacks in another. For example, digital internationalization can increase while physical mobility declines; research cooperation can deepen even as political trust weakens. Second, the analysis assumes that Ukraine has power. It is not simply an object of external educational influence, but also an actor capable of shaping the terms, boundaries,

and priorities of its international activities. Third, regional educational spaces are seen as overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. Ukraine's commitments to the European Higher Education Area do not logically exclude selective and carefully managed forms of broader regional cooperation. Fourth, education is seen as inseparable from state capacity, socio-economic development, and national security.

The methodology also acknowledges its limitations. As the regional environment is rapidly evolving, especially in the context of war and post-war reconstruction, any assessment remains historically conditioned. Institutional capabilities may change as geopolitical alignments, funding mechanisms, technological infrastructure, and partnership models change. Furthermore, the Eurasian Educational Space is not a stable or universally recognized category in itself. Nevertheless, the conceptual framework remains analytically useful because it allows for differentiated interpretation rather than binary judgment.

Thus, Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space can be productive only if it is selective, value-based, security-conscious, and institutionally compatible with the country's European educational commitments.

Results. Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space is closely linked to and depends on Ukraine's educational position. Ukraine's educational position is shaped by its unique geopolitical, cultural, and civilizational location. It is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia not only geographically, but also institutionally and historically. This intermediate position has often been interpreted politically, but it is no less important from an educational perspective. Ukrainian higher education emerged through a combination of European intellectual traditions, imperial administrative structures, Soviet institutional heritage, and post-independence reform efforts. As a result, Ukrainian educational institutions embody several historical layers at once. They are neither isolated national entities nor simple extensions of external models. They are hybrid institutions located in several overlapping educational spaces.

This hybridity creates both challenges and potential. On the one hand, it can generate tensions in political orientation, especially when different educational vectors imply different institutional norms or symbolic meanings. On the other hand, it can allow Ukraine to function as a bridge

between academic worlds, provided that such a role is framed in terms of strategic activity rather than passivity. Marginson's (2008) concept of global higher education as a relational sphere is particularly instructive here. Ukraine need not be understood as standing "between" rigid blocs. Instead, it can be seen as participating in multiple spheres of knowledge exchange simultaneously, each with different rules, opportunities, and risks.

Practically, this means that Ukraine's educational future should not be built on the assumption that one regional vector should completely exclude all others. A stronger principle is compatibility with national priorities and the normative architecture that Ukraine has consciously chosen, especially with regard to the European Higher Education Area. Within this framework, broader transregional interaction may still be possible in research, digital collaboration, thematic academic networks and sectoral educational initiatives. It is worth noting that the biggest obstacle to any broader regional educational integration is the geopolitical divide caused by the war. Cooperation in education is often idealized as a realm above politics, but this assumption is untenable in contexts where political violence directly affects institutions, people and infrastructure. In the case of Ukraine, the war damaged campuses, displaced students and staff, disrupted research, created financial difficulties and changed the very geography of educational services. It has also transformed the ethical and strategic meaning of cross-border cooperation.

At the same time, geopolitical discontinuity does not eliminate the need for broader international engagement. It intensifies it. Precisely because war isolates, destroys, and fragments, universities need international networks to ensure continuity, solidarity, recovery, and reconstruction. The question, therefore, is not whether Ukraine should remain internationally connected, but how it should structure such connectivity in a way that maintains sovereignty and resilience.

An important issue related to Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Education Space is regulatory compatibility and the problem of educational standards. Regional educational integration works most effectively when participating systems have at least partially comparable standards of qualifications, credit systems, quality assurance and institutional governance. The European Higher Education Area illustrates how sustained coordination can gradually create a relatively

coherent regulatory space despite national differences (Keeling, 2006; Ravinet, 2008). Ukraine's educational reform efforts are largely moving in this direction, focusing on student-centred learning, external quality assurance, degree transparency and compatibility with European frameworks (Lugovyi et al., 2025).

However, the wider Eurasian educational macro-region remains normatively uneven. Some systems have implemented reforms similar to European models, while others retain more centralized, bureaucratic, or opaque mechanisms. This divergence creates uncertainty about common degrees, recognition of qualifications, common programs, and mutual trust in the quality of education. If Ukrainian institutions deepen their cooperation with partners that operate to significantly different standards, they may face practical problems and reputational ambiguity. At worst, such cooperation may weaken incentives for internal modernization by normalizing lower or less transparent benchmarks.

This issue should not be exaggerated to the point of total rejection of regional cooperation. Normative divergences exist in many parts of the world, particularly in Europe. Importantly, successful cooperation depends on institutional filtering and standards-based partnerships. Ukrainian universities need a strong internal culture of quality assurance and clear criteria for international academic agreements. The ability to cooperate without compromising standards is itself a sign of institutional maturity.

Another of the most visible dimensions of educational integration remains academic mobility. It supports intercultural competence, curriculum modernization, joint leadership, language development, and professional networking. Teichler (2017) emphasizes that mobility has become a central component of internationalization, but also notes that its forms and consequences vary significantly. For Ukraine, mobility has had both an expanding and a destabilizing impact.

On the positive side, mobility exposes Ukrainian students and researchers to different academic cultures, research methods, institutional practices, and technological environments. It can promote knowledge dissemination, support professional growth, and help universities establish strong international ties. This is particularly important for early-career researchers and doctoral students, whose development often depends on access to broader academic communities.

However, mobility also creates asymmetries. In the face of economic hardship, wartime uncertainty, and limited domestic capacity, external mobility can turn into permanent departures. The result is a brain drain that undermines national potential at a time when highly skilled human capital is needed for reconstruction. The problem is not just that people are leaving; it is that institutions may lack the means to turn mobility into circulation rather than one-way exit. If Ukrainian scholars build careers abroad without meaningful return channels, shared affiliations, or long-term collaborations with domestic institutions, the development benefits of mobility are diminished.

Mobility policies therefore need to be rethought. Rather than measuring success by the sheer number of participants leaving, Ukraine should prioritize models that include return scholarships, distance learning grants, joint appointments, diaspora engagement, reintegration grants, and distributed research teams. In this sense, digital technologies become important not as a replacement for mobility but as mechanisms for maintaining connections after physical displacement.

Internationalization and institutional inequality are important in Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space. Knight (2013) warns that internationalization can develop "for better or for worse," depending on how it is managed and who benefits from it. This insight is particularly relevant in the case of Ukraine. Internationalization often favors already strong institutions: large metropolitan universities, research-intensive centers, and organizations with established international offices, foreign language capabilities, and grant management expertise. Smaller or regional universities may have difficulty participating meaningfully in international networks, even when they perform socially important functions.

This uneven distribution of integration opportunities can spread internal stratification within national higher education systems. Some institutions become globally connected and resource-rich, while others remain peripheral and overburdened. In Ukraine, where the higher education landscape is already characterized by uneven institutional capacity, broader regional integration could exacerbate such inequalities if not supported by targeted support. Therefore, public policies and donor-supported reconstruction strategies should include capacity-building mechanisms for less well-off universities: training in

international project management, development of digital infrastructure, language support, mentoring on quality assurance, and incentives for regional institutions to join transnational consortia. A strategically designed integration model should avoid reducing international engagement to a prestige project for a narrow academic elite. Instead, it should consider educational openness as part of national development, including regional renewal, local knowledge ecosystems, and distributed institutional resilience.

It is difficult to overestimate the role of research cooperation and knowledge production in Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space. The scientific and research dimension of educational integration is often more significant than symbolic participation in formal networks. Universities gain long-term value from internationalization not just by signing agreements, but also by joining joint knowledge production processes. This includes joint research projects, publication partnerships, joint supervision of doctoral theses, shared infrastructures, thematic research clusters, and innovation ecosystems linked to industry and public policy.

Kvit (2020) and Lugovyi et al. (2025) point to the structural problems of higher education reform in Ukraine, including the need to strengthen the research function of universities. Historically, the gap between universities and individual research institutions has limited the integration of teaching and research. This remains a problem compared to more science-intensive systems of higher education. If Ukraine wants to participate productively in the wider Eurasian educational space, it must do so not only through mobility and teaching, but also through active participation in research.

It creates opportunities. The broad Eurasian macroregion includes numerous institutions working on common strategic issues: energy systems, logistics, cyber governance, agriculture, medicine, climate adaptation, water management, urban renewal, and migration. Ukraine can benefit from joining problem-oriented transregional research networks in such fields, especially where they intersect with post-war recovery. Thematic collaboration of this kind is less susceptible to superficial symbolism because it is based on substantive scientific tasks. It can also create opportunities for external funding, technology transfer and publication visibility.

However, not all research collaborations are automatically beneficial. Issues of intellectual property, data security, ethical regulation and institutional trust are central. Selective participation remains important. Cooperation in research should prioritize transparency, reciprocity and strategic relevance for the long-term development of Ukraine.

One of the most important developments in higher education in recent times is the rise of digital internationalization as a new form of educational integration. Williamson et al. (2020) show how digital technologies have transformed educational governance, pedagogy, and institutional practice. For Ukraine, this shift has additional significance as digital adaptation has accelerated in the face of crisis, displacement, and infrastructure disruption. Universities have had to maintain continuity of learning through distance and hybrid means, often under extremely challenging circumstances. However, this painful experience has given rise to new forms of competence.

Digital integration is changing the geography of educational collaboration. It allows institutions to participate in international academic life without relying entirely on travel budgets or physical security. Virtual exchanges, collaborative online learning, shared courses, hybrid conferences, remote labs, shared repositories, and online microcertificates can function as components of a broader educational space. In this sense, the Eurasian educational field is becoming increasingly digital as well as territorial.

For Ukraine, this presents a strategic opportunity. Digital connectivity can lower the threshold for participation for regional universities, facilitate ongoing engagement with displaced scholars, and support more flexible forms of mobility. It can also help Ukraine build educational bridges with institutions in Asia and other parts of the wider region where physical exchange is costly or logistically difficult. Moreover, digital tools can strengthen post-conflict reconstruction by supporting teacher training, psychosocial education, professional retraining, and access to global learning resources.

However, digitalization also creates new risks. Dependence on external platforms, unequal access to technology, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and the commercialization of educational data complicate the picture. Therefore, a digital integration strategy should include

sovereignty-sensitive infrastructure planning, investment in secure platforms, and support for digital literacy among faculty and students.

Another important component of the process of Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian educational space is language, identity, and the politics of academic communication.

Language policy is a particularly sensitive dimension of Ukraine's educational integration. Historically, academic interaction in much of the post-Soviet space has favored the Russian language as a *lingua franca*. Today, this legacy has profound political and ethical implications. In Ukraine, the strengthening of the Ukrainian language in education is inseparable from statehood, cultural self-affirmation, and decolonization. Educational policy cannot ignore this symbolic and political dimension.

At the same time, successful participation in the international academic community requires multilingualism. English has become the primary language of global higher education, research publications, and transnational cooperation. Therefore, Ukraine's language strategy in education should not only protect and develop the Ukrainian language, but also significantly expand English language competence in teaching, research, administration, and doctoral studies. Additional language skills relevant to specific regional partnerships can also be useful, provided that they are chosen pragmatically and not imposed through inherited dependency.

The challenge is to avoid perceiving language as a zero-sum issue. A strong Ukrainian academic language and a strong international communication capacity can reinforce, rather than weaken, each other. Universities that produce high-quality knowledge in Ukrainian, and that engage in English-language and multilingual scholarly dialogue, are better placed to defend intellectual autonomy and enhance global visibility. In the broader Eurasian context, language competence can be a tool for selective engagement rather than symbolic subordination.

Educational integration is not just about collaboration between scholars. It is also about participation in educational markets. Universities compete for students, reputation, partnerships, and resources. Ukraine has historically had certain advantages in fields such as medicine, technical education, engineering, and aviation training. Before the military upheavals, Ukrainian institutions attracted international students from across the region. This experience suggests that the country has a latent

ability to position itself as an educational provider in the broader Europe-Asia corridor.

A forward-looking integration strategy could build on this by developing hybrid and international programmes, online pathways, micro-accreditations and vocational education tailored to the needs of the regional labour market. Supported by robust quality assurance and the restoration of physical security, Ukrainian universities could restore and expand their educational attractiveness. This would not only generate revenue, but would also enhance international visibility and create long-term academic links.

However, market participation should not overshadow academic values. The global trend towards the commercialisation of higher education has raised concerns about the decline in the quality of education, over-reliance on fee-paying students and the instrumentalisation of internationalisation. Ukraine should therefore pursue the attractiveness of education as part of a balanced strategy that safeguards academic standards, equity and social responsibility.

Post-war reconstruction is a window for rethinking education. One of the most important conclusions of this analysis is that post-war reconstruction, despite its tragic origins, can provide a rare opportunity for a systemic rethinking of education. Reconstruction is not simply about replacing damaged buildings. It is about rethinking institutional architectures, governance models, digital systems, academic priorities, and the relationship between universities and society. Higher education can play a central role in preparing professionals for infrastructure reconstruction, public administration, health, education, urban planning, environmental restoration, and social reintegration.

This process will require international cooperation on an unprecedented scale. However, the most effective form of cooperation will be one that strengthens Ukraine's own institutional performance. Rather than reproducing dependency, international engagement should support shared development, knowledge transfer, local capacity building, and long-term partnership structures. In this context, broader regional educational integration can be helpful if it links Ukraine to problem-solving networks across Europe and Asia, especially in areas related to reconstruction and future resilience.

Kremen (2011) emphasizes the philosophical necessity of educational change in response to new historical conditions. This insight is very

relevant here. Post-war reconstruction should not aim to restore the previous educational status quo. It should be used to create a more flexible, internationally connected, digitally advanced, and socially responsive system.

So the cumulative analysis points to a clear conclusion: Ukraine needs a selective, value-based, and multi-vector model of educational integration. Such a model should reject two equally unhelpful extremes. The first extreme is a naive regional openness that ignores security, standards, and political realities. The second is a defensive closure that puts any broader regional interaction at risk and thereby unnecessarily narrows Ukraine's academic horizon.

A balanced strategy for Eurasian integration should be based on the following principles:

European compatibility as a normative framework: Ukraine's compliance with European educational standards should remain a fundamental benchmark for ensuring quality, governance, comparability of degrees and academic rights;

Security-based partner selection: international academic cooperation should be filtered by ethical, legal and strategic criteria, especially in war and post-war contexts;

Research-oriented internationalization: partnerships should prioritize substantive collaboration in science, innovation and problem-solving, not just formal declarations;

Mobility as circulation: policies should encourage return, shared affiliation, diaspora engagement and long-term connectivity, rather than one-way outflows;

Digital infrastructure as a strategic potential: safe and inclusive digital ecosystems should be seen as the foundation of educational resilience and international engagement;

Supporting institutional inclusiveness: opportunities for integration should be expanded beyond a narrow circle of elite institutions through targeted capacity-building measures;

A language policy based on sovereignty and openness: Ukrainian should be strengthened as the national academic language, and English and other useful languages should be developed for international communication.

This model is consistent with Knight's (2013) warning that internationalization can take different forms depending on how it is

managed. It also resonates with Robertson et al.'s (2016) argument that regional educational spaces are shaped by power and therefore need to be critically oriented. For Ukraine, the main challenge is not whether to integrate, but how to integrate without jeopardizing autonomy, quality, or national sustainability.

A clearer understanding of the prospects for Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian educational space can be achieved through a scenario approach. At least three strategic scenarios can be distinguished.

The first is a passive-adaptive scenario, in which Ukrainian institutions remain formally open to broad international cooperation, but lack sufficient state support, institutional capacity, or strategic coordination. In such a scenario, integration develops unevenly and situationally. Individual universities or scholars may receive short-term benefits, but the country as a whole risks reproducing dependence, fragmented partnerships, and one-sided mobility. Such a scenario is undesirable because it allows external dynamics to shape Ukraine's academic future without proper internal governance.

The second is a defensive-restrictive scenario, in which security risks and geopolitical trauma generate excessive closure. In this case, educational cooperation outside the narrow circle of trusted frameworks becomes politically sensitive or institutionally undesirable. While such a strategy may seem protective, in the long run it risks isolating Ukrainian universities, reducing access to wider research networks, and weakening the country's intellectual competitiveness. For a state striving for recovery, modernization, and global visibility, educational closure will come at a high development cost.

The third is the selective-transformational scenario, which appears to be the most productive. Within this model, Ukraine consciously differentiates forms of regional cooperation, maintaining a strong European normative orientation while building pragmatic, security-sensitive, and research-oriented partnerships in the broader Eurasian macroregion. Such a strategy would prioritize institutional quality, digital integration, reciprocity of exchanges, and thematic cooperation in areas important for reconstruction and innovation. This scenario does not deny risks, but manages them through governance, standards, and strategic choices.

Thus, integration and competitiveness directly concern changing the university model itself. Educational integration today does not simply

combine existing institutions; it transforms their internal structure. Universities are expected to be more research-oriented, internationally visible, digitally competent, entrepreneurial and socially sensitive. This creates pressure, but at the same time opens up new opportunities.

For Ukraine, participation in wider educational networks should be linked to the formation of a new institutional model: the university as a sustainable, autonomous, networked and innovative organization. Such a university is not limited to teaching functions. It also participates in regional problem-solving, interacts with business and public institutions, produces internationally recognized research and works effectively in a hybrid digital environment.

The wider Eurasian educational space could be one of the environments in which such a model is tested and developed, especially through problem-oriented networks in the fields of technology, healthcare, sustainability, logistics and regional studies. However, the crucial factor remains internal transformation. International integration can accelerate competitiveness only where there is already a serious commitment to institutional quality, strategic leadership and research development. Thus, the future model of the Ukrainian university must emerge from the interaction of internal reforms and carefully regulated international openness.

Conclusions. Ukraine's integration into the Eurasian Educational Space is a strategically important, but conceptually and politically complex issue. The analysis has shown that the Eurasian Educational Space should not be understood as a homogeneous or exclusively geopolitical entity. It is better conceptualized as a broad, heterogeneous and multi-layered macro-regional field of educational interaction, shaped by historical heritage, mobility routes, institutional connections, digital platforms, research networks and emerging forms of transregional cooperation. In this area, Ukraine occupies a special position as a country whose higher education system has been influenced by both European integration and broader regional interdependence.

The prospects for such integration are limited by serious challenges. These include the geopolitical divide caused by the war, security concerns, regulatory divergence in standards and quality assurance, uneven institutional capacity, insufficient funding, academic brain drain, internal inequality between universities, linguistic and identity tensions,

and insufficient linkages between education, science, and innovation. These factors make illegible or politically decontextualized models of integration unsuitable for Ukraine.

At the same time, the study has identified significant opportunities. Selective engagement with the wider educational macro-region can expand research collaboration, diversify international partnerships, support digital internationalization, improve access to wider educational markets, strengthen regional expertise, and facilitate post-conflict reconstruction. The growing importance of hybrid and virtual forms of academic exchange further enhances Ukraine's ability to participate in wider educational processes without being fully dependent on traditional mobility formats. The main conclusion is that Ukraine should not view the Eurasian Educational Space as an alternative to European integration. Instead, it should develop a model of educational openness in which European standards remain the normative framework, while wider regional cooperation is pursued pragmatically, selectively, and in accordance with national interests. Such a model should be value-oriented, security-conscious, and institutionally grounded. It must protect academic autonomy, strengthen quality assurance, support talent retention, and link internationalization to broader goals of innovation, sustainability, and renewal.

From this perspective, Ukraine's educational future depends less on formal declarations of geopolitical affiliation than on the sophistication of its strategic choices. If Ukrainian higher education can combine sovereignty with openness, digital transformation with institutional depth, and mobility with national capacity building, it can emerge not as a peripheral participant but as an active and intellectually influential actor in the changing educational architecture that connects Europe and Asia.

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