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## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS THE MAIN STRATEGIC GOAL OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

*In the current conditions of transformation of Ukrainian society, military challenges and integration into the European Higher Education Area, improving the quality of higher education is gaining strategic importance. The quality of the educational process is becoming not only an academic, but also a socio-economic category that determines the competitiveness of the state, its human potential and capacity for innovative development. Ensuring the quality of education requires higher education institutions (HEIs) to take a systematic approach to updating educational programs, personnel development, digitalisation and the formation of effective internal and external control mechanisms. In the conditions of war and post-war reconstruction, special attention should be paid to the flexibility of the educational process, the preservation of human capital and the integration of international standards into the quality management system.*

*The purpose of the study is to generalise the conceptual principles and practical mechanisms for improving the quality of higher education in Ukraine in the conditions of military challenges and post-war reconstruction, to determine the main directions of development of the education quality assurance system, to analyse risks and expected results of implementing effective policies in this area.*

*The materials of the study are: 1) regulatory legal acts of Ukraine and the EU that regulate the system of quality assurance of higher education (ESG, documents of the National Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education); 2) analytical reports of the Ministry of Education and Science, the State Service for Quality of Education, ENQA, OECD; 3) works of domestic and foreign scientists devoted to the issues of quality management of education, personnel development, digitalisation and institutional sustainability of HEIs. The study used the methods of theoretical generalisation, content analysis, structural-functional approach, comparative analysis, as well as systemic risk analysis and assessment of managerial effects from the implementation of quality improvement policies.*

*The article determines that improving the quality of education is the central strategic goal of the development of HEIs, which has a multiplier effect: it ensures the competitiveness of universities, increases the employability of graduates, promotes international integration and financial sustainability. The main directions of the quality improvement policy are identified: updating the content of education, developing internal and external QA systems, human resource development, digitalisation of infrastructure, expanding international cooperation, financial diversification and social inclusion. Particular attention is paid to the specifics of quality assurance in wartime conditions - preserving human capital, adapting programs to the needs of reconstruction, introducing reserve educational models and using international grant opportunities. Key risks of policy implementation (financial, personnel, technical, institutional) are identified and mechanisms for their mitigation are defined. The expected results are increasing the effectiveness of education, strengthening public trust, institutional stability and international reputation of Ukrainian HEIs.*

*Further research should be focused on developing models for assessing the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems, studying the impact of hybrid learning formats on academic results, as well as the role of HEIs in the processes of national reconstruction. A comparative analysis of European QA practices, in particular ESG and ENQA, with the possibility of their adaptation to the Ukrainian context is promising. Deepening research in this area will contribute to the formation of a modern system of quality management in higher education, capable of ensuring its sustainability, transparency and efficiency in the global educational space.*

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*Keywords: quality of higher education, quality assurance (QA), higher education institution, internal quality system, ESG, human resource development, digitalisation, institutional sustainability, international cooperation.*

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## ПІДВИЩЕННЯ ЯКОСТІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ ЯК ОСНОВНА СТРАТЕГІЧНА ЦІЛЬ РОЗВИТКУ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

*У сучасних умовах трансформації українського суспільства, воєнних викликів та інтеграції до Європейського простору вищої освіти підвищення якості вищої освіти набуває стратегічного значення. Якість освітнього процесу стає не лише академічною, але й соціально-економічною категорією, що визначає конкурентоспроможність держави, її людський потенціал і спроможність до інноваційного розвитку. Забезпечення якості освіти вимагає від закладів вищої освіти (ЗВО) системного підходу до оновлення освітніх програм, кадрового розвитку, цифровізації та формування ефективних механізмів внутрішнього і зовнішнього контролю. В умовах війни та післявоєнної відбудови особливу увагу слід приділяти знучності навчального процесу, збереженню людського капіталу та інтеграції міжнародних стандартів у систему управління якістю.*

*Метою дослідження є узагальнення концептуальних засад і практичних механізмів підвищення якості вищої освіти в Україні в умовах воєнних викликів та післявоєнного відновлення, визначення основних напрямів розвитку системи забезпечення якості освіти, аналіз ризиків та очікуваних результатів реалізації ефективної політики у цій сфері.*

*Матеріалами дослідження є: 1) нормативно-правові акти України та ЄС, що регулюють систему забезпечення якості вищої освіти (ESG, документи Національного агентства із забезпечення якості вищої освіти); 2) аналітичні звіти МОН, Державної служби якості освіти, ENQA, OECD; 3) праці вітчизняних і зарубіжних науковців, присвячені питанням управління якістю освіти, кадрового розвитку, цифровізації та інституційної стійкості ЗВО. У дослідженні використано методи теоретичного узагальнення, контент-аналізу, структурно-функціонального підходу, порівняльного аналізу, а також системного аналізу ризиків та оцінювання управлінських ефектів від реалізації політики підвищення якості.*

*У статті визначено, що підвищення якості освіти є центральною стратегічною метою розвитку ЗВО, яка має мультиплікативний ефект: забезпечує конкурентоспроможність університетів, підвищує працевлаштування випускників, сприяє міжнародній інтеграції та фінансовій стійкості. Виокремлено основні напрями політики підвищення якості: оновлення змісту освіти, розбудова внутрішніх і зовнішніх систем QA, кадровий розвиток, цифровізація інфраструктури, розширення міжнародної співпраці, фінансова диверсифікація та соціальна інклюзія. Особливу увагу приділено особливостям забезпечення якості в умовах війни – збереженню людського капіталу, адаптації програм до потреб відбудови, впровадженню резервних освітніх моделей та використанню міжнародних грантових можливостей. Виявлено ключові ризики реалізації політики (фінансові, кадрові, технічні, інституційні) та визначено механізми їхнього пом'якшення. Очікуваними результатами є підвищення ефективності навчання, зміцнення довіри суспільства, інституційна стійкість і міжнародна репутація українських ЗВО.*

*Подальші дослідження доцільно зосередити на розробленні моделей оцінювання ефективності внутрішніх систем забезпечення якості, вивченні впливу гібридних форматів навчання на академічні результати, а також ролі ЗВО у процесах національної відбудови. Перспективним є порівняльний аналіз європейських практик QA, зокрема ESG та ENQA, з можливістю їх адаптації до українського контексту. Поглиблення досліджень у цьому напрямі сприятиме формуванню сучасної системи управління якістю вищої освіти, здатної забезпечити її стійкість, прозорість та ефективність у глобальному освітньому просторі.*

*Ключові слова: якість вищої освіти, забезпечення якості (QA), заклад вищої освіти, внутрішня система якості, ESG, кадровий розвиток, цифровізація, інституційна стійкість, міжнародна співпраця.*

**Problem Statement.** Ensuring the quality of higher education is a key factor in the competitiveness of the national educational system, sustainable economic development, innovative potential, and social cohesion. In the context of globalisation, digital transformation, and security challenges — particularly the full-scale war against Ukraine — the quality of education has become critically important both domestically and internationally. The country's strategic documents identify the improvement of higher education quality as a priority direction for reform and European integration of the educational system.

Today, the challenge lies not only in compliance with national and European standards but also in the ability of higher education institutions (HEIs) to adapt to rapid changes: fluctuations in funding, demographic decline, relocation of students and academic staff, the need for new competencies (digital, analytical, interdisciplinary), and the preservation of scientific potential. The war has caused the destruction of educational infrastructure, reduced access to quality educational resources, and migration of teachers and students. At the same time, this period has underscored the role of universities as centres of resilience, innovation, and the development of human capital for the recovery of the country. Thus, improving the quality of higher education is the main strategic goal for the development of HEIs, ensuring their competitiveness, resilience to crises, and ability to meet the needs of society and the knowledge economy.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** The issue of quality assurance in higher education is actively studied by both domestic and foreign scholars, which underscores its relevance in the context of global educational transformations.

According to Kalinicheva H. I. [1], knowledge management in higher education institutions is the foundation for training competitive specialists capable of critical thinking and prompt response to modern challenges. The researcher emphasises the importance of creating a system of continuous learning within the university environment, which contributes to improving the quality of the educational process through the development of internal communications and digital competencies.

Other authors [2] argue that the quality of education directly affects the socio-economic development of the state. In particular, such indicators as the level of teachers' salaries, the student-to-teacher ratio, and the level of graduate training correlate with the income level of the population and the overall human capital of the country.

Nikolaienko S. M. [3] examines the relationship between the quality of higher education and the competitiveness of Ukrainian universities, emphasizing that insti-

tutional quality is a strategic condition for integration into the European Higher Education Area. In turn, Horban O. [4] focuses on the role of knowledge management in improving the quality of educational processes and the innovative potential of institutions.

Ethical and value aspects are revealed by Dotsenko I. O. [5], who notes that academic integrity is a key prerequisite for the quality of education, and adherence to ethical principles builds trust in the educational system. Moroz V. M. and Moroz S. A. [6] have conducted a comprehensive analysis of the impact of professional pre-higher education on the quality of higher education. They show that effective integration of educational levels contributes to improving the quality of training for future specialists.

Sikorskyi P. and Kolodii I. [7] consider the structuring of educational material as a basic factor in ensuring quality, while Vavreniuk S. A. [8] focuses on monitoring methods as a tool for quality management. Domestic researcher Zatserkivna M. [9] emphasises the role of digitalisation in ensuring accessibility and competitiveness of education, especially under wartime conditions.

Among foreign authors, Biggs J. and Tang C. [10] highlight the importance of formative assessment, which not only measures but also stimulates learning. Gibbs G. and Simpson C. [11] emphasise the role of feedback as a factor in the continuous improvement of the educational process. Keeling R. P. [12] proposes the concept of holistic student development, which involves combining academic, social, and psychological aspects of education. Yusuf F. A. [13] establishes a close connection between the total quality management (TQM) system and the effectiveness of educational processes.

Thus, a review of the literature allows us to state that the quality of higher education is shaped by a complex of factors — from institutional management, personnel policy, academic culture, and integrity to the use of digital technologies and interaction with the labour market. Improving the quality of education is not only a requirement of the times but also a strategic condition for the development of universities as leading institutions of social progress.

The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive scientific substantiation for improving the quality of higher education as the main strategic goal for the development of higher education institutions, to determine its significance in ensuring the competitiveness, resilience, and innovative potential of universities under wartime challenges, globalisation, and digital transformation, and to formulate practical recommendations for improving state and institutional policies for quality assurance in education.

**Materials and Methods.** The research materials are:

1. The regulatory and legal framework of Ukraine in the field of higher education quality assurance (the Law of Ukraine “On Higher Education,” Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 409 “On Approval of the Procedure for Accreditation of Educational Programs,” the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2022–2032, provisions of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG 2015);
2. Analytical and statistical data from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA), and

the State Statistics Service of Ukraine on the dynamics of the number of HEIs, students, accreditation results, and quality evaluation of educational programs;

3. Scientific works of domestic and foreign authors devoted to the issues of higher education quality, knowledge management, formative assessment, digitalisation of the educational process, and institutional development of universities.

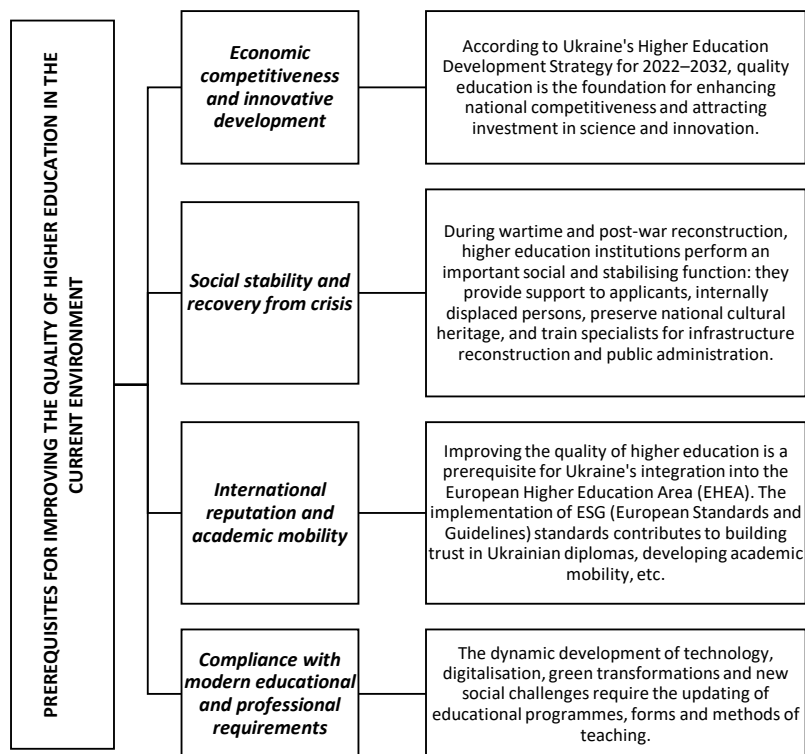
The following methods were used in the research: systems analysis (to determine the relationship between education quality and the strategic development of HEIs), comparative method (to analyse national and international approaches to quality assurance), structural-functional analysis (to identify factors affecting the quality of education), statistical method (to analyse trends in higher education indicators), as well as the method of generalisation – for drawing conclusions and recommendations on strategic directions for improving the quality of higher education.

**Presentation of the Main Material.** In the current globalised and unstable environment, improving the quality of higher education becomes not only a priority of educational policy, but also a key factor for the sustainable development of the state. Quality education ensures the formation of human capital capable of innovative activity, flexible adaptation in the labour market, and active participation in social transformations. Higher education becomes a strategic resource for development, as it is high-quality training of specialists that ensures innovative growth, technological transformation, and integration of Ukraine into the European educational and scientific space.

The prerequisites for improving the quality of higher education in the present conditions are linked to the need to ensure economic competitiveness, social stability, international integration, and compliance with the dynamic changes of the labour market (see Figure 1). Quality education develops specialists with modern competencies necessary for the development of an innovative economy, increased labour productivity, and the implementation of technological solutions in various sectors [14]. In times of war and reconstruction, universities play a key social role—supporting internally displaced persons, preserving intellectual potential, and training personnel for the country’s recovery. At the same time, the implementation of European quality assurance standards (ESG) strengthens the international reputation of Ukrainian HEIs, develops academic mobility, and fosters integration into the European Higher Education Area [15]. Alongside this, rapid technological changes, digitalisation, and “green” transformations require updating educational programs, teaching and assessment methods, which enables universities to train flexible, competitive, and socially adaptable specialists.

Improving the quality of higher education is the main strategic goal for the development of higher education institutions, as quality acts as a multiplicative factor in university effectiveness. Enhanced quality of the educational process increases the success and competitiveness of graduates, raises the institution’s attractiveness for prospective students, and expands opportunities for attracting funding, especially through grants, international projects, and partnerships [16]. Furthermore, Ukraine’s integration into the European Higher Education Area requires compliance with European ESG standards, which involve the systematic implementation of internal and external quality assurance at all management levels [15]. The lack of proper quality poses risks of losing academic reputation, declining student enrollment, reduced

funding, and degradation of intellectual potential, which is particularly dangerous under wartime and post-war reconstruction conditions. At the same time, societal demand for high-quality, transparent, and effective education is growing: employers, students, and the state expect clear assessment criteria, evidence-based learning outcomes, and university accountability. Thus, improving quality is not only a requirement of the times but also a strategic vector for the development of HEIs, on which the resilience of the educational system, social progress, and Ukraine's global competitiveness depend.



*Fig. 1. Prerequisites for Improving the Quality of Higher Education in the Present Conditions, compiled by the author*

In the current context, improving the quality of higher education is not only a strategic goal for the development of higher education institutions but also a determining factor in the overall competitiveness of the state. Higher education is primarily a public good for the individual, as it fosters critical thinking, professional mobility, and social engagement. Only after that does education become a resource for economic development and social progress. Therefore, strategic directions for development must take into account the needs of students, academic staff, the labour market, and the state (see Table 1).

**Content and Learning Outcomes.** One of the key areas for improving the quality of higher education is updating the content of education in line with current labour

market demands and competency-based approaches. The development of educational programs should be based on the principles of learning outcomes, aimed at forming practical, digital, and “soft” skills. It is important to implement interdisciplinary and modular formats that promote flexibility and individualisation of educational trajectories. The openness and transparency of criteria for assessing learning outcomes, as well as establishing effective feedback with employers, graduates, and other stakeholders, are crucial for increasing the relevance of education to societal needs [14].

*Table 1. Recommended strategic directions for improving the quality of higher education, compiled by the author*

<b>Strategic direction</b> <i>1</i>	<b>Recommended Measures</b> <i>2</i>	<b>Expected results</b> <i>3</i>
<b>1. Content and results of education</b>	Updating educational programmes based on a competency-based approach, integrating digital and soft skills, interdisciplinarity, transparent assessment of results	Alignment of specialist training with labour market needs, improvement of learning outcomes
<b>2. Review of educational standards</b>	Updating state standards with a clear distinction between general and professional competencies	Increased mobility of applicants, development of lifelong learning
<b>3. Staff development and motivation</b>	Improving teacher qualifications, supporting academic integrity, attracting international lecturers, developing scientific careers	Improvement of teaching skills, innovation in the educational process, staff retention
<b>4. Role of teachers and students</b>	Actively involving students and teachers in quality management processes; integrating science into education	Increasing engagement, developing a culture of quality
<b>5. Prestige of work in higher education</b>	Fair pay, social guarantees	Staff retention, enhancing the prestige of the profession
<b>6. Quality assurance system (internal and external)</b>	Development of internal QA policies and procedures in accordance with ESG, participation in external accreditation, monitoring of the effectiveness of educational programmes	Systemic quality assurance, stakeholder trust, European integration
<b>7. Institutional accreditation</b>	Comprehensive assessment of HEIs with preferences given to successful institutions	Increasing transparency, stimulating competition and innovation
<b>8. Reform of state orders</b>	Access to state orders only for accredited programmes	Cost optimisation, increasing competition
<b>9. Infrastructure, Digitalisation, and Technical Renewal of HEIs</b>	Modernisation of classrooms, laboratories, libraries; development of LMS and digital educational resources; implementation of hybrid learning	Increased accessibility of education, continuity of learning in crisis conditions
<b>10. International Cooperation and Mobility</b>	Development of double degree programs, participation in Erasmus+, international research and educational projects, harmonisation of standards	Growth of international reputation, academic mobility, increased attractiveness of HEIs
<b>11. Financial Sustainability and Resource Provision</b>	Diversification of funding: state orders, grants, business contracts; transparent budgeting	Increased investment in education quality, financial autonomy of universities
<b>12. Social Responsibility and Inclusion</b>	Support for internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, creation of an inclusive educational environment, social programs, mentoring	Social stability, inclusiveness, strengthening of public trust in HEIs

**Review of Higher Education Standards.** A relevant direction for improvement is the approach to structuring competencies within standards. General competencies should differ only according to the level of higher education (bachelor's, master's, doctor of philosophy), while professional competencies must take into account the specifics of particular specialties. This approach will simplify the transfer of learning outcomes, increase academic mobility, and foster the formation of lifelong learning competencies.

**Staff Development and Motivation.** The quality of education directly depends on the professionalism of instructors. Therefore, a priority is the systematic professional development of teaching staff — particularly in areas of modern teaching methodologies, digital technologies, and academic integrity. It is important to create incentives for involving practitioners, business representatives, and international experts in the educational process. The development of scientific potential, the formation of individual career trajectories, and support for young scholars all contribute to increasing motivation and the resilience of personnel [17].

**The Role of Instructors and Learners in Quality Assurance.** One of the key factors in quality assurance is the motivation level of instructors. Academic staff should not only be knowledge carriers but also researchers capable of integrating scientific results into the educational process. This increases the attractiveness of teaching, promotes the development of research competencies in students, and stimulates innovation in learning.

Student motivation, in turn, is shaped not only by pedagogical methods but also by the demand for future professions, wage levels, and social guarantees. This indicates the necessity of synergy between educational and socio-economic state policy.

**Prestige of Academic Staff Work.** An important direction is increasing the prestige of academic staff work. The situation where the salary of an academic staff member is lower than that of the graduates they have trained reduces motivation and stimulates staff outflow [17]. Implementing the principle of fair pay is one of the key factors in retaining highly qualified personnel.

Quality Assurance System (Internal and External). Building an effective quality assurance (QA) system in HEIs involves creating internal quality management mechanisms in line with ESG standards — with clearly defined policies, procedures, responsibilities, and monitoring of results. Such a system should be integrated at all university management levels and facilitate decision-making based on reliable indicators (KPIs). An important aspect is the readiness of HEIs for external accreditation and participation in national and international QA processes, which increases trust in the quality of Ukrainian education [16].

**Institutional Accreditation.** Institutional accreditation plays a significant role as a mechanism for the comprehensive assessment of educational institutions. Its successful completion indicates systematic quality assurance, alignment with strategic priorities, and transparency of management processes [17]. An important step is introducing preferences for institutions that have successfully passed institutional accreditation, such as priority in the allocation of funding or grants.

**Reforming State Procurement.** State procurement should be a tool for stimulating quality. Educational programs that have not passed accreditation or have received limited accreditation should not be eligible for state-funded places, except for spe-

cially designated areas deemed critically important for the economy. This will enable rational use of budget resources and motivate HEIs to improve the quality of educational programs.

**Infrastructure, Digitalisation, and Technical Modernisation of HEIs.** Modern quality education is impossible without an updated material and technical base. Modernising classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and scientific equipment is a key condition for the formation of an innovative educational environment. Special attention is paid to the development of digital platforms, learning management systems (LMS), electronic resources, and secure online access. The creation of hybrid and distance learning models increases the flexibility and resilience of HEIs to crisis challenges [18].

**International Cooperation and Mobility.** Internationalisation is an integral factor in improving education quality. Active participation in Erasmus+ programs, international research projects, and the implementation of joint educational programs and double degrees promotes the exchange of best practices and the enhancement of academic culture. Harmonisation of educational standards in accordance with ENQA requirements ensures mutual recognition of diplomas and stimulates student and faculty mobility [15].

**Financial Sustainability and Resource Provision.** Financial stability is the foundation for the development of education quality. HEIs must diversify their sources of income — combining state funds, paid educational services, partnerships with business, and participation in international grant programs. Transparent budget planning, a focus on efficient resource use, and investment in priority areas for quality development create long-term advantages.

**Social Responsibility and Inclusion.** Higher education should fulfil not only an educational but also a social function. Ensuring equal access to education for all population categories, including internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, is a manifestation of universities' social responsibility. Inclusive practices, mentoring programs, psychological support, and assistance in graduate employment build trust in the institution as a socially oriented entity.

The war has become a powerful catalyst for the transformation of the higher education quality assurance system in Ukraine. Crisis conditions have exposed the vulnerabilities of the education system, while simultaneously accelerating modernisation processes. Universities have been forced to transition from formal quality assurance to real management of quality as a strategic resource. Changes pertain not only to formats of teaching but also to management culture—focusing on flexibility, resilience, digital readiness, and human capital (see Figure 2).

**Specific features of improving the quality of higher education during the war include:**

- 1. Flexible Learning Formats.** The war has emphasised the need for universities to quickly adapt to changing environments. Flexibility in the educational process means the ability to swiftly switch between offline, online, and blended learning formats, taking into account security risks and student accessibility. HEIs are introducing backup platforms, creating offline materials, and developing autonomous teaching scenarios in case of communication or power outages. These approaches ensure not only continuity of education but also its resilience to crisis impacts [18].

<i>Flexibility of learning formats</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structures are needed that can quickly switch between offline, online and mixed formats, taking into account security and accessibility.</li> </ul>
<i>Preservation of human capital</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protecting academic staff and students (psychological support, relocation, job retention programmes) should be a priority to avoid a brain drain.</li> </ul>
<i>Restructuring of resources and infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The distribution of finances and priorities in times of limited budgetary resources should support critical areas: digital infrastructure, data security, distance learning, etc.</li> </ul>
<i>Adapting educational programmes to reconstruction needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training specialists in the fields of infrastructure reconstruction, energy, medicine, cybersecurity, and psychosocial support are priority areas that must be integrated into curricula.</li> </ul>
<i>Enhancing the role of universities as centres of resilience and recovery</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In wartime, modern higher education institutions become not only educational but also social institutions – centres of assistance to communities, hubs of volunteer and analytical activity.</li> </ul>
<i>International support and projects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The use of international aid programmes, grants and partnerships (Erasmus+, SEQA-ESG, donor initiatives) supports the role of HEIs in times of crisis and accelerates compliance with international standards.</li> </ul>
<i>Integration of the security component into the educational process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities should develop courses on civil protection, crisis management, cyber hygiene, and algorithms for action during emergencies.</li> </ul>
<i>Monitoring and evaluating quality in crisis situations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapted quality indicators are needed that take into account the constraints of wartime (e.g., course availability, academic community cohesion, level of support for vulnerable students).</li> </ul>

*Fig. 2. Features of Improving the Quality of Higher Education in Wartime, compiled by the author*

**2. Preservation of Human Capital.** During the war, people remain the main resource of universities. Maintaining faculty and students requires a comprehensive support policy: psychological, social, and material. Important initiatives include temporary relocation programs, remote employment for teachers, scholarship initiatives for students, and measures to prevent “brain drain.” Creating a safe and supportive environment helps preserve intellectual potential and ensure the sustainable development of the education system even under wartime challenges.

**3. Restructuring Resources and Infrastructure.** Decreased budget funding and infrastructure destruction require rethinking resource management at HEIs. Priority should be given to areas that ensure the continuity of the educational process — development of digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and support for distance learning systems. At the same time, funding for laboratories and research bases that foster the development of defence, engineering, and recovery competencies is essential. This enables HEIs to play an active role in national recovery processes [17].

**4. Adapting Educational Programs to Recovery Needs.** The war has radically changed the demand for specialists. The modern higher education system must respond promptly by integrating areas related to postwar recovery — construction, energy, medicine, cybersecurity, environmental safety, psychological and social support for the population — into educational programs. This requires updating standards, flexible curricula, and close cooperation with employers. Such an approach ensures the relevance of education and increases its practical value for society [14].

**5. Strengthening the Role of Universities as Centres of Resilience and Recovery.** Modern HEIs during the war become not only educational but also social institutions — centres for community assistance, hubs for volunteer and analytical activities. Their mission is expanding: universities provide shelter, organise humanitarian aid, conduct research on infrastructure recovery, and support social adaptation. The cultivation of a culture of resilience and civic responsibility among students and faculty enhances the role of education as the foundation of social recovery.

**6. International Support and Projects.** The international community plays a significant role in supporting Ukrainian universities during wartime. Participation in Erasmus+, SEQA-ESG, Horizon Europe, donor initiatives, and partnership projects helps universities not only maintain academic activities but also integrate modern approaches to quality assurance. Such initiatives contribute to infrastructure restoration, staff development, and the formation of a positive international image of Ukraine [15].

**7. Integration of Security Components into the Educational Process.** Wartime necessitates the development of security skills — both physical and informational. Universities develop courses on civil protection, crisis management, cyber hygiene, and emergency response algorithms. Security education becomes an integral element of quality education, equipping students not only with knowledge but also with the ability to act effectively under uncertainty.

**8. Monitoring and Assessment of Quality in Crisis Conditions.** In wartime, classical approaches to quality assessment require adaptation. It is important to develop flexible indicators that take into account the specifics of crisis circumstances: access to educational resources, retention of students, digital literacy, support for vulnerable groups, and psychological resilience of the academic community. The National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) is working on recommendations for flexible quality audits, enabling real assessment of university effectiveness under challenging conditions [16].

Thus, the development of internal quality systems, updating educational programs to meet recovery needs, integrating international ESG standards, and active participation in global partnerships are transforming HEIs into centres of social stability and innovative development. Therefore, quality assurance is no longer just a

procedure — it becomes a component of national security, a tool of social cohesion, and a guarantee of the country's recovery in the postwar period.

*Table 2. Risks in the formation and implementation of higher education quality improvement policy, compiled by the author*

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Ways to avoid</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>Insufficient funding and its instability</i></b>	Limited or irregular funding leads to reduced investment in modernisation, staff development, infrastructure and digitalisation, which hinders improvements in the quality of education.	Diversification of funding sources (grants, partnership programmes, commercial educational services), creation of stabilisation funds, lobbying for state programmes to support the quality of education
<b><i>Shortage of qualified personnel</i></b>	Outflow of teachers and researchers abroad or to the private sector, low motivation due to unstable remuneration and workload	Enhancing the prestige of academic careers, developing programmes to support young lecturers, engaging external experts and part-time researchers
<b><i>Technical and Cyber Risks</i></b>	Active digitalisation of education without proper data protection can lead to failures, data loss, or attacks on educational platforms	Development of cybersecurity policies, regular audits of information systems, data backup, staff training on digital security
<b><i>Institutional Inertia and Resistance to Change</i></b>	Some staff or management may resist reforms related to changes in management practices, teaching methods, or quality assessment	Implementation of programs to change organizational culture, motivational mechanisms for staff, communication strategies explaining the benefits of reforms
<b><i>Inappropriate or Formal QA Procedures</i></b>	Internal quality assurance systems formally exist but do not affect real educational outcomes; QA is conducted only for reporting purposes	Institutional strengthening of quality centres, integration of QA into strategic management, training managers and instructors on effective quality management principles
<b><i>Gap Between Education and Labour Market</i></b>	Educational programs do not take into account the dynamic needs of the labour market, reducing graduates' competitiveness	Regular labour market monitoring, creation of employer advisory boards, dual education programs, adaptation of curricula to current professional standards

The implementation of higher education quality improvement policies occurs under significant uncertainty, giving rise to various risks (see Table 2). These may arise at both the institutional and systemic levels, affecting the effectiveness of educational reforms, the stability of HEI operations, and public trust in the educational system. In the context of war and limited resources, risks are heightened, and their management requires proactive measures—anticipating potential threats, creating adaptation

mechanisms, and developing strategies to minimise negative consequences [16; 17; 18].

Thus, the risks associated with the formation and implementation of higher education quality improvement policy are systemic and interrelated. They encompass financial, staffing, technological, and managerial aspects of educational institution functioning. The most critical risks are funding instability, staff shortages, and the gap between education and labour market needs, as these directly affect the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Effective management of these challenges requires comprehensive approaches — strategic planning, institutional flexibility, partnership development, and continuous monitoring of educational quality processes.

The formation of an effective policy for improving higher education quality involves not only the development of strategic documents and control mechanisms but also the achievement of concrete, measurable results. Its successful implementation should strengthen the position of higher education institutions in the national and international educational space, enhance graduate competitiveness, ensure efficient resource utilization, and boost public trust in the educational system. The expected results reflect a comprehensive effect—educational, economic, social, and reputational—which determines the strategic role of higher education institutions in the recovery and development of the state in the face of contemporary challenges.

Expected outcomes from forming and implementing an effective higher education quality improvement policy:

Improved learning outcomes and graduate competencies. Implementing quality policy will facilitate updating educational program content, enhancing students' digital and professional competence, developing critical thinking, innovation, and practical training. This will ensure higher employability, labour market flexibility, and lifelong learning ability for graduates [16].

Strengthening the international status of HEIs. Integration into the European Higher Education Area through compliance with ESG standards and participation in ENQA networks will promote international recognition of Ukrainian diplomas, expand academic mobility, and attract international students. Participation in joint research projects and grant programs will enhance universities' scientific reputations [15].

Increased institutional resilience. Implementing a systematic approach to quality management enables universities to better respond to crises—from war to economic shocks. Flexible educational models, development of distance learning, cybersecurity, and diversification of funding sources (state, private, grant) lay the foundation for universities' long-term stability [17].

Strengthening the role of HEIs in national recovery and development. Graduates with up-to-date knowledge in construction, energy, medicine, social work, management, cybersecurity, and innovative technologies become a key resource for postwar reconstruction. Thus, universities are transformed into centres for human capital development and regional modernisation [14].

Improved public trust in higher education. Transparency in assessment processes, openness of information about educational program quality, and effective management increase public trust in HEIs. This contributes to greater interest from prospective students, support from the state and business, and a positive image of Ukrainian education.

Development of a quality culture in the academic environment. Fostering internal motivation for quality assurance among instructors, students, and administrators will support sustainable system development, where quality becomes part of the educational culture, not just an external requirement.

In summary, the formation and implementation of an effective higher education quality improvement policy is a strategic factor in strengthening the country's educational potential and competitiveness. A comprehensive approach—from improving educational content to building institutional resilience and international integration—ensures not only short-term improvements but also long-term modernisation of the educational system. In the future, this will help restore trust in higher education, enhance the role of universities in developing human capital, and promote the country's socioeconomic revival.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research.** Improving the quality of higher education in Ukraine is a key precondition for integration into the European Higher Education Area and for securing the country's sustainable socioeconomic development. In today's context—especially in light of wartime challenges and future national recovery—the quality of education is not only an academic but also a strategic issue. It serves as a tool for preserving human capital, developing national intellectual potential, and shaping a state capable of transformation.

A comprehensive quality improvement policy should cover all aspects of the educational process: from updating content and teaching methods to reforming management and financial mechanisms. Main directions of such a policy include modernisation of educational programs in line with labour market needs and a competency-based approach, implementation of interdisciplinary learning models, development of digital skills, and the establishment of effective internal quality assurance systems in accordance with European ESG standards. Strengthening staff capacity is also essential: preparing instructors for new pedagogical approaches, fostering research activity, and expanding international academic mobility opportunities.

Prospects for further research include developing effective models for evaluating the efficiency of internal quality assurance systems, analyzing the impact of hybrid learning formats on academic results, and studying the role of HEIs as centres of social stability and recovery in the postwar period. It is also advisable to expand empirical research focused on measuring the impact of QA reforms on student satisfaction, graduate employability, and university competitiveness in the international education market.

Thus, the quality of higher education today is not just a matter of standards or procedures, but a strategic vector for the country's development. The effectiveness of quality improvement policy implementation will determine the future formation of Ukraine's intellectual potential, its ability to integrate into the global educational space, and its role in global scientific and innovation development.

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