

UKRAINIAN VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: MILITARY IDENTITY AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES¹

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Abstract. This article is devoted to investigating the post-military transition of veterans from the army to higher education. This transition is treated as one of the “soft” variables of a veteran’s social adaptation. In-depth semi-structured interviews² with Ukrainian veteran students examine the influence of military culture on veterans’ perceptions of the communicative environment found in universities, and the findings from those interviews are presented here. The attitude of veteran students toward online learning is also discussed, and the axiological content of veteran students’ educational practices is analyzed.

Keywords: veteran students; higher education; military identity; post-military transition; transmission of information; communicative learning; online learning; values

Introduction

As a result of conflict in the Donbass, new educational actors have emerged in Ukrainian higher education—veteran students—whose educational practices may somewhat differ from the practices of other students. The post-military transition of servicemen from the

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army to the civilian sphere via higher education can be treated as one of the “soft” variables of their social adaptation, which involves overcoming the identity crisis that inevitably accompanies these kinds of complex social transitions. Higher education, with its egalitarian value system, provides veteran students an opportunity to move from a tense life in the army toward professional activity that makes it possible to transform a military identity into a civilian one.

As a definition of the term “veteran student,” we will use a formulation designed with reference to the definition given by D. Vacchi³ and the Ukrainian act “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of their Social Protection”:

“A veteran student is a student who is a current or former member of the Active Duty Military, the National Guard, Reserves or other military formations and law enforcement agencies who could take part in combat actions on the territory of their own or other states”⁴ (Vacchi 2012: 17).

In 2015, Ukrainian veteran students were provided with preferential training conditions in higher education. Thus, the Ukrainian act “On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of their Social Protection” (amendments 2015 and 2018) deals with “providing participants in combat actions and their children with state targeted support for getting higher education in state and municipal educational institutions, which is provided in the form of full or partial payment of tuition at the expense of state and local budgets; concessional long-term loans for education; social scholarships; free provision of textbooks; free access to the Internet, database systems in public and municipal educational institutions; free accommodation in hostels” (“On the Status of War Veterans” 2015, 2018). At the same time, Ukrainian universities have not yet established loyalty programs aimed at attracting veteran students to higher education and providing them with comfortable learning environments. Therefore, there is a need to study the conditions of veteran learning in Ukrainian universities, to identify problems related to veterans' social adaptation in the educational environment, analyze their attitude toward higher education reforms, and conduct a comparative analysis of educational practices of veteran students at local and global levels.

Many Western (especially American) scientists have studied the transition of military personnel from the army to higher education. In particular, there has been interest in the social adaptation of veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. D. Vacchi, D. DiRamio, and K. Jarvis draw attention to the critical importance of the development of civilian identity for the success of veterans' academic careers (Vacchi 2012; DiRamio & Jarvis 2011). Likewise, H. Wheeler, I. Hunter-Johnson, B. Jenner, B. Cantrell, and C. Dean emphasize that the transition from military service to civilian student life is difficult and disorienting for many veterans, and argue that it is necessary to develop reintegration

³ “A student veteran is a student who is a current or former member of the Active Duty Military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience or legal veteran status” (Vacchi 2012: 17).

⁴ “Veterans of the war are those who participated in defense of the Motherland or in military operations on the territory of other states. The veterans of the war include: combatants, persons with disabilities as a result of the war, participants in the war” (On the status of war veterans... 2018).

programs in universities that help veterans to improve on necessary training skills (Cantrell & Dean 2007; Wheeler 2012: 790; Jenner 2017; Hunter-Johnson 2018). Considering a different complication, L. Wang, G. Elder, and N. Spence suggest that participation in combat can have a negative impact on the likelihood of a veteran earning a higher education degree; in addition, veterans are much less likely to earn a degree from a university than they are to earn one from a college (Wang, Elder & Spence 2012: 413). Furthermore, I. Hunter-Johnson, V. Schiavone, D. Gentry, L. Zinger, A. Cohen, J. Cunningham, and B. Boeding pay considerable attention to the comparative analysis of military and academic culture, the contrast between which can slow down the academic career of veterans (Hunter-Johnson 2018; Cunningham 2012; Schiavone & Gentry 2014; Zinger & Cohen 2010; Boeding 2017). Finally, D. Molina, J. Cunningham, L. Perna, M. Titus, L. Zinger and A. Cohen study the motivations that influence the admission of veterans to universities, as well as their academic performance (Molina 2015; Zinger & Cohen 2010; Cunningham 2012; Perna & Titus 2005). In Ukrainian sociology, psychology, and pedagogy, no research has yet been conducted on the post-military transition of veterans from the army to higher education, although such research is necessary for developing programs to optimize the social adaptation of veterans to academic and civil life.

The aims of our empirical study are the following: to identify the features of veteran students' attitudes toward the reform of higher education; to study the sociocultural and value aspects of their academic activities; to establish a link between the military experience and educational practices of veteran students. Our research method is an in-depth semi-structured interview, which includes the following analytical topics:

- 1) the influence of military culture on veterans' perceptions of the university communicative environment;
- 2) the attitudes of veteran students to online learning;
- 3) the axiological content of veteran students' educational practices.

Since one of the objectives of this study is to identify the influence of military identity on the educational practices of veteran students, the interview uses a question aimed at determining the form of veteran identity (military, civil or mixed one): "Whom do you feel yourself first of all: a military; a civilian; or a military and a civilian at the same time." As a research hypothesis, a thesis was proposed regarding the possible influence of military experience (participation in combat) on the educational practices of veterans, as this experience strengthens the military identity of soldiers and makes them less flexible in the process of social adaptation. The following questions are used to identify veterans' combat experience: "Did you participate in combat actions? Have you been injured? How many years/months have you spent in a combat zone in ATO (Antiterrorist Operation) in Donbass region?" Interviews were conducted face-to-face with five veteran students studying in the state universities of Kharkiv - V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Kharkiv Petro Vasylenko National Technical University of Agriculture, Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University - in March-April 2019. The interviews were electronically recorded and subsequently

transcribed; average interview duration was 45 minutes. To increase the level of reliability of the research results, the triangulation method has been used (the interview texts have been analyzed by two researchers). Information about the interview participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants in the study “Ukrainian veterans in universities”

Participants	Sex	Age	University, faculty, year of study	Number of years/months spent in the combat zone	Level of education before and after service	Military experience	Marital status/cultural capital of parents (parents' education)
Participant 1	M.	27	Kharkiv Petro Vasylenko National Technical University of Agriculture, Faculty of Law, the second year of study	1 year 8 months	Certificate on graduation from technical school (2011), entered the University in 2018	Since 2012, he served in airborne troops; in 2014 he was mobilized, served in the 93rd Infantry Brigade; since 2015 – in the special forces “Omega” (National Guard of Ukraine); rank – foreman; was shell-shocked	Single, no children; parents have higher education
Participant 2	M.	23	H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Faculty of Law, the third year of study	4 months	Certificate on graduation from military lyceum (2013), entered the University in 2016	Since 2013, he served in the border troops, from 2014 he was mobilized in the ATO, served as a machine gunner; rank – junior sergeant; had no injuries or contusions	Single, no children; parents do not have higher education
Participant 3	M.	24	V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Physics and Technology Faculty, the first year of magistracy	1 year	Certificate on graduation from high school (2011), entered the University in 2011 (studying was interrupted for two years in connection with	Since 2014, he served in the 93rd Infantry Brigade; rank – ordinary soldier, had no injuries or contusions	Single, no children; the mother has a higher education, the father does not

					military service)		
Participant 4	M.	32	Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs, Faculty of Law, the fourth year of study	4 years	Certificate on graduation from profile lyceum (2005), incomplete higher education (Institute of Border Troops in Khmelnytsky), entered the University in 2015	Service in the army since 2006, then police service; since 2014, service in the Kharkov battalion (border troops); rank – sergeant; position – inspector of border guard service; had no injuries or contusions	Married, two children; the father has no higher education (the respondent has no mother)
Participant 5	M.	36	Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs, Faculty of Law, the fifth year of study	2,5 years	Certificate on graduation from profile lyceum (2001), incomplete higher education (Academy of Agriculture), entered the University in 2014	Service in the police since 2002, since 2014 he served in the ATO in the battalion of special police; rank – senior sergeant; position – policeman of platoon; had no injuries or contusions	Single, no children; parents do not have higher education

Sociocultural aspects of post-military transition for veteran students

The post-military transition of veterans from the army to the academic field can be complicated by differences between the military culture (with its values of discipline, teamwork, the ability to distance oneself from personal interests, the capacity for unquestioning obedience to commanders, endurance) and civilian culture (with its values of freedom, independence, self-realization, and the ability to resist the dictates of circumstances or external actors). If during his/her service in the army, a social actor has deeply assimilated the values of the culture of submission/obedience, then, after returning to the civil sphere, he/she might need some time and additional efforts to re-socialize and reactivate the egalitarian values of civilian culture. Since the university environment can, in some respect, be viewed as the quintessence of values of egalitarianism and democracy, it can be assumed that transition from the army to a civilian field through higher education can become the optimal format for the social adaptation of veterans. Meanwhile, in the scientific literature, considerable attention is paid to various risk situations associated with the process of adaptation of veteran

students to the university environment, which most often arise in the first year of study and can lead to their departure from the university. These risks include the possible incongruity of the value-behavioral systems of veterans and other students who entered university immediately after school, potentially resulting in mutual rejection and isolation of veterans. Other risk factors are a lack of academic performance from veterans who, while serving in the army, could have lost their learning skills; a lack of social support from teachers and university administrators who are poorly familiar with the psychological and adaptation problems of war veterans, etc. The attitude of veteran students to their studying and the learning progress can be influenced by the teaching style and content of educational reforms, which can also be considered sociocultural aspects of educational practices.

Western sociology of education pays considerable attention to the comparative analysis of military and university culture. I. Hunter-Johnson has identified four contexts of inconsistency between the military and university styles of learning: 1) student's passivity vs. activity; 2) the difference in the pace of learning; 3) the difference between the role of an instructor and learning environment, and 4) the difference between individualistic and collectivistic attitudes of students (Hunter-Johnson 2018: 72). In the army, a soldier acts as a passive training object whose task is to strictly assimilate information transmitted by officers, without critical analysis or personal interpretation. On the contrary, universities encourage students to take active academic attitudes, which includes a readiness and ability to produce original ideas and implement them in scientific work. Second, in the army, training courses have a narrow profile, are short in contact hours (from one day to several weeks/months), and require a fast pace and regularly completed tasks. University curricula, on the other hand, are more fundamental, diverse, and presume more time to master them. Third, there is a significant difference between the role of an instructor in the army and an instructor at a university. A military instructor can (and often should) use an authoritarian style of training, demanding that soldiers accurately reproduce (literally memorize) information, and applying punishment in the event of failure to complete training tasks by the appointed date. On the contrary, a university lecturer can consult with students, provide them with the opportunity to independently acquire knowledge and interpret it freely, and be more lenient with the fact that students do not always complete tasks on time. Such a teaching style may cause veterans to doubt the competence of teachers and feel dissatisfaction with the lack of precise instructions. Fourth, the army highly appreciates collective work, the ability of servicemen to work together for solving problems, and the ability to help each other cope with difficulties in performing the learning tasks. At the university, the individualism of students is encouraged to a greater extent, as the latter have to independently to carry out learning tasks (although the ability of students to work together in the process of performing project tasks is also valued at the university). Veteran students can be annoyed by the overly relaxed atmosphere in the classrooms (using mobile phones, talking while lecturing), which they regard as a manifestation of weak discipline and the inability of teachers to force students to respect them (Hunter-Johnson 2018: 74).

V. Schiavone and D. Gentry, L. Zinger, A. Cohen, and J. Cunningham (Cunningham 2012; Schiavone & Gentry 2014; Zinger & Cohen, 2010) analyze the transition of veteran

students to universities using the concept of cultural shock. They pay attention to differences between university and army cultures such as the absence of a rigid hierarchy in relations between students and teachers, and doubts about the implicit obedience of any scientific authority (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). B. Kelley, J. Smith, E. Fox, and K. Money present the main differences between military and academic cultures as dichotomous pairs: 1) hierarchical structure vs. collegial structure; 2) absolute authority vs. relative authority; 3) focus on submission to authorities vs. focus on critical assessment of leadership; 4) training based on transmission of information through instruction vs. training aimed at generating knowledge through experience and discussion; 5) masculine values vs. gender-neutral values; 6) group cohesion based on conformity vs. cohesion based on different interests and individuality; 7) the goal of fulfilling a mission vs. the goal of finding your own path; 8) conservative social norms vs. liberal social norms (Kelley, Smith & Fox 2013; Money 2015). At the same time, there are “mixed” cultural forms in the university and in the army; for example, authoritarian subordination structures may be established in the academic field between administration and teachers, teachers and other teachers, teachers and students, and students and students. Conversely, in some army units, liberal contexts that value communitarian rather than hierarchical relations between commanders and soldiers are possible. Sociocultural contrasts between military and academic values can cause veteran students to become alienated from university life and suspend their studies. As N. Schlossberg emphasizes, the greater the difference/dissimilarity between pre-transition and post-transition environments of a social actor’s life, the more difficult it becomes to adapt to new sociocultural environments (Schlossberg 1981).

As B. Boeding believes, core army values of discipline, commitment to combat, brotherhood, and courage are deeply implanted in the consciousness and unconsciousness of servicemen, and they cannot be instantly changed or reformatted in the post-military transition from army to civilian life (Boeding 2017). These values can become a serious obstacle to the social adaptation of veteran students and lead to their social isolation. As D. Vacchi emphasizes, the masculine military culture forces veterans to always be (or appear) strong, and, as a result, they may be afraid to appear weak or ignorant to other students; they can even be ashamed to ask for academic help when faced with a learning failure, or, they may hide their veteran status in order to feel better about asking for support from others (Vacchi 2012: 18). University assistance programs for veteran students that are designed to facilitate transition to university life become especially necessary in these situations.

Keeping in mind the possibility of the coexistence of various sociocultural patterns in the education field, we aimed to study the attitude of veteran students toward two training models, which can be called authoritarian and liberal: the former being the model of transmission of information and the latter being the model of communicative learning. The transmission model emphasizes the authoritarian superiority of the teacher over the students, as they command the obedience of students through discipline. On the contrary, in the communicative model, the teacher and the students become equally learners, where “both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire 2006: 72). If the goal of learning in the transmission model is the student’s uncritical reception of information

from the lecturer, the communicative model deals with the creative formation of knowledge in the process of discussion and experimentation, as well as encouraging intellectual non-conformism from participants who must be able to produce and protect their own understanding of scientific problems (Bataeva 2016: 6). In the modern theory of education, the communicative model is recognized as the conceptual basis for reforming higher education, while the transmission model is regarded as outdated and inappropriate to the shifting values in modern society.

In our study, a hypothesis is advanced regarding the possible preference amongst veteran students for the model of transmission, due to its congruence to the military culture of obedience. To test this hypothesis, veteran students were offered examples of two different learning situations in the context of lecture/practical classes, where the two situations represented the authoritarian and liberal training models discussed above: a) “What style of conducting practical classes do you prefer: 1. A teacher gives a task, proposes an algorithm for solving it, and monitors its exact execution according to a given example. Or: 2. A teacher provides students with an opportunity to find an independent solution to a problem. What style of teaching is met more often in your university?” And b) “What style of giving lectures do you prefer: 1. A teacher transmits the information that students must learn and then reproduce in a practical lesson. 2. Lessons are held in the form of discussion of a specific problem, as a result of which students, together with the teacher, make a decision and draw conclusions. What style of teaching is encountered more often in your university?” In order to identify the possible influence of military experience on the preferences of veteran students, answers to these questions have been compared with information on the military identity of veteran students.

According to the results of our study, it is difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions about which model of teaching is preferred by veteran students (for this, more large-scale qualitative or quantitative research is needed). Two veteran students positively evaluated the learning model of transmission in which there are some limitations on the independent and creative work of students. In the opinion of Participant 1:

“[I]t is better to have clear instructions and algorithms for performing tasks. It seems to me that it is easier for a military man to have someone guiding them, telling them what to do and how to act in a situation. Even if you do something by yourself, then, at least, [you can do it] according to the instructions. And if they say, 'go and look by yourself,' this is more complicated than according to the instructions.”

Participant 4 gave the following assessment of the transmission model of learning:

“An independent search for a solution to a problem is, in principle, correct, but only if a teacher gives some example to a group. A student should be given information to put into his/her head, because what is self-study, you know? This is like having to read things on the weekend... It is more interesting when you work in a group, and not by yourself.”

Three other veteran students highly appreciated the communicative model of learning, which is associated with an interactive teaching style, students' independent search for an algorithm for performing tasks, and greater cognitive freedom. Participant 3 said that

he liked the authoritarian teaching style with the one-sided transmission of information (from teacher to student) *before* the army, and, *after* the army, the interactive teaching style and independent work on tasks became more attractive:

“[B]efore the army I liked when the teachers considered several tasks, ‘chewed’ them to the last letter, and then asked students to solve the tasks by themselves and helped us. And now we have such seminars – we are discussing more... More independent work... They do not just mumble monotonous nonsense at the blackboard, but you ask and things clear up; when everyone speaks lively, things stick in the mind. Now what I like most is understanding the information.”

Thus, in our study, there was no unequivocal evidence supporting the hypothesis of preference among veteran students for the transmission model of instruction. It turned out that three participants preferred the communicative format of learning that gives students the opportunity to actively participate in the discussion of scientific problems and independently find solutions. The results of our study could be influenced by the fact that none of the veteran students identified themselves as “military” — i.e., it can be assumed in their case that the transition from military to civil/mixed identity became a reality. Consequently, the egalitarian-liberal values of academic culture managed to somewhat shift the military value of obedience. There were also no obvious correlations between the pre-army cultural capital of the respondents and their preferences for education style (for example, all five respondents had pre-army experience training in technical/vocational schools or universities, and they showed varying preference for transmission and communicative learning models). No correlations were observed between the cultural capital of the respondents’ parents (having a higher education) and their assessments of the educational process. For example, Participant 1, both parents of whom had higher education, negatively assessed the communicative style of education, while Participants 2 and 5, whose parents had no higher education, emphasized the effectiveness of the communicative style. The presence of combat experience also did not have a significant impact on the preferences of veteran students for either learning model.

Keeping in mind the ambiguity of the veteran students’ evaluations of the transmission model, universities should develop flexible curricula using an individual approach to this category of students, taking into account their various needs. It is desirable that these programs have an applied focus and include a certain percentage of tasks that describe the sequence of actions necessary to solve them. As K. Money emphasizes, the main difference between training in the army and learning in higher education is that actors are trained to act in the army and taught to reflect in higher education. For the successful integration of veterans into university life, it is necessary to synthesize the active and reflexive intentions of military and academic culture. More attention should be paid to developing practice-oriented courses for veteran students and the possibilities for instructing them in the communicative mode (Money 2015).

Prospects for online learning for veteran students

In modern theories of education, considerable attention is paid to analysis of the peculiarities of a new learning format, —online learning—which is available in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. Online learning is a form of distance education that facilitates interaction between teachers and students through internet technologies in classrooms, homes, places of business, transport areas, and other public places. M. Sumadyo, H. Santoso, and D. Sensuse emphasize that online education is focused on providing learners with personalized learning experiences wherein the teacher plays the role not of an instructor, but of a facilitator assisting students in achieving learning goals. Students' metacognitive abilities to self-regulate and self-control play an important role in the online learning process (Sumadyo, Santoso & Sensuse 2017: 45). Since online learning is carried out in a relatively free format that does not imply strict control by teachers, it is therefore necessary that students have the ability to independently monitor their learning process, look for relevant literature, plan their activities, perform the necessary training tasks on time, and check the quality of their performed. On the other hand, there is evidence indicating that students studying online have, on average, insufficiently developed metacognitive skills such as self-control and self-monitoring. Only 1–17% of students complete online courses, and the rest, apparently, lack the metacognitive skills necessary to complete their learning activities (Bataeva 2019). For successful learning through online education, it is necessary for students to have pre-formed educational motivation and developed metacognitive abilities for planning, monitoring, and control of their cognitive activities.

Is it prudent to hypothesize that the online learning format might not be quite effective for veteran students, since it does not involve teachers closely monitoring the learning process? Can we expect that veteran students also might have underdeveloped metacognitive abilities that may complicate their ability to learn in online formats? To answer these questions, we will look at the results of several sociological studies (including our study “Ukrainian veterans in higher education”).

A study by A. Williams, conducted using interviews(N=13), revealed some features of online learning that are important for veteran students. Because veterans are embarrassed to seem unknowing and incompetent in front of other students (and for this reason they may feel uncomfortable in the classroom), the private online training format can help them create a social context of security from negative assessments of their intellectual level. As one veteran student said, “students are not face-to-face with someone who is going to say they are disappointed in the student” (Williams 2016). Veteran students emphasized that, since online learning is impersonal and does not imply the real presence of someone who could tell the students what they should do or who could be addressed in the event of an unfulfilled task, the development of self-discipline and the persistence to achieve good results becomes inevitable. The discipline and persistence of servicemen are shaped in the context of military culture, through daily physical training aimed at self-overcoming and endurance development.⁵ Thus, according

⁵ As D. Vacchi stresses, “veterans generally can adapt and overcome challenges due to a spirit of persistence ingrained into the military psyche” (Vacchi 2012: 18).

to a study that interviews 31 veteran students, about two-thirds of student veterans identified discipline and organizational skills as personal abilities that were formed during military service and that have promoted successful training (Norman et al., 2015: 705). H. Wheeler notes that time-management skills and dedication developed in the army help veterans to focus on university studies (Wheeler 2012: 782). Due to these professional qualities, veterans are capable of successfully learning through online education. For working veteran students, a positive aspect of online learning is the possibility of flexible schedules that allow work and study to be combined. It is also obvious that online learning can be an indispensable format for veterans with disabilities, for whom it is difficult to physically attend classroom sessions. It has to be noted that an unfavorable outcome of online learning can be disconnectedness from other students and teachers, which can lead to social and emotional loneliness among veteran students.

To identify the attitude of Ukrainian veteran students to online learning the following question was used in our study: “Would you prefer to study remotely (online, through electronic courses) or in classical form (in the classroom, with teachers)? Why?” We also tried to find out *how* veteran students assess their metacognitive abilities, which are required for successful online learning. For this purpose, two questions were used:

- 1) “Distance online learning requires a great deal of autonomy and diligence from a student, since it involves little control over the learning process by teachers. In your opinion, would you have enough purposefulness and persistence to complete online learning and get a diploma?”;
- 2) “In your opinion, does your military experience help to achieve the best academic results? Can you say that after the army you have become more purposeful, punctual, disciplined than before the army?”

Our task was also to understand whether there is any connection 1) between the veterans’ self-esteem and confidence in their metacognitive abilities and their military experience/identity, or, 2) between their attitude toward online learning and the presence of family/work.

The participants of our study confirmed that military service contributes to the development of discipline and punctuality. For example, Participant 1 replied:

“Let’s take me 4–5 years ago. I never came on time. Now I like to come on time, and I do not like to wait for people, and I do not like [people] waiting for me.”

Meanwhile, other veteran students lacked a sufficiently responsible attitude toward learning and showed limited metacognitive skills and control of their cognitive activity. For example, Participant 1 stated that:

“[F]or the first time I tried to pass the session by myself. I hoped that I would pass easily, but it did not work out, because I do not really attend classes... I did not come very prepared. And the grade which was given did not suit me. I did not learn very well, and I understood why the grade was such that it was. Because I did not answer well - who needs such a student?”

Participant 3 reported cases of passing tests through “arrangements” with teachers, without a sufficiently deep understanding the material and despite missing several classes when he wanted to “sleep.”

Based on an analysis of the interviewees' comments, one can make the assumption that the contradictory/ambivalent complex of metacognitive abilities among servicemen is developed in the army: on the one hand, diligence and time-management skills are developed, while, on the other hand, *self*-monitoring and *self*-control skills are not formed, since servicemen become accustomed to *external* control and *external* monitoring by commanders. For instance, Participant 1 stated that:

“[T]he army, you know, is like a kindergarten, where there are a lot of people sitting and they cannot do anything without an order. There are many ideas, but nowhere to apply them. And those people who are trying to develop themselves in civilian life are, of course, helped by military experience. But there are a lot of people who just 'sit' in the army.”

Participant 2 noted that, in his opinion, military experience and army skills have little effect on academic performance:

“[D]oes military experience help in learning? It does not affect learning - everything depends on a person. War is war, and learning is learning, and these are completely different things. It is like fire and water; they cannot be combined in any way.”

The development of veterans' metacognitive abilities can be negatively influenced by the presence of a long interval between graduating from secondary school and entering a higher learning institution. For example, in the case of participants in our study, this interval was quite long—from three to 10 years. One of the participants in the study entered university immediately after school, studied until the fourth year, then went to serve as a volunteer and returned to the university after three years of absence. Another negative factor can be contusion and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which also adversely affect the cognitive and metacognitive abilities of an individual (e.g., Participant 1, who had problems with academic performance, had a contusion). It can be assumed that improvement of cognitive and metacognitive skills in the military becomes possible only in the case of personal efforts and hard work on their development.⁶ By itself, the military context does not contribute to the automatic appearance of the whole set of metacognitive skills necessary for successful completion of online courses.

Thus, in our study we did not find convincing arguments proving the optimality of the online learning for veteran students. It is likely that face-to-face classroom training (which can be complemented, but not replaced by online learning) may be more effective for veteran students. This assumption was confirmed by negative evaluations of online learning by veteran students in our study. For example, Participant 1 assumes that:

⁶ Participant 1 gave the example of his fellow serviceman, who successfully studied distantly: “Everything is possible, if you make good efforts. Here is my friend. He studied remotely. He was in ATO and always found time for learning, finishing tasks and sending them by e-mail. He did everything and finished his studies. Now he works in justice”.

“[W]hen you see a tutor, then the information reaches you easier than if you read it. I also read a lot on the internet. I can read about cars, about how to fix them. But no one shows me this, no one explains it to me in-person, so I would not be able to perform an auto repair.”

Participant 3 emphasized that online learning in his department of physics and technology is simply impossible, since the study of exact sciences requires attendance at classroom/laboratory sessions and direct participation in experimental work:

“[W]ould you trust a nuclear power plant to a person who studied remotely, most likely not. Serious things — such as medicine — need to be learned in the classroom, not at home... If something is inaccurate and not extremely important, then you can learn this online — why not? If you are at home and learn online, then you can be distracted by things like listening to music, and it is harder to concentrate. And when you’re part of the [classroom] audience, once you enter, you cannot go anywhere, you will learn, and your concentration is better.”

It is also necessary to take into account the influence of family/work factors on the interest of veteran students in online learning. For example, Participant 2 (33 years old, has a family and two children, works) approvingly spoke about online learning:

“If you have the desire, then it’s nothing unusual ... At home you sit, log in on the computer, read a lecture, then you can download this lecture, and then pass the exam, answer the questions.”

At this stage of the study, the correlation between military/combat experience and the attitude of veteran students toward online courses has not been established.

Educational values of veteran students

Before analyzing our data, we emphasize that, in Western sociology, the educational values of veteran students remain practically not studied. In our study, the educational values of veteran students were revealed thanks to the respondents’ answers to the question of how higher education can help them. Each of the three suggested answers to this question was represented by traditionalist (“becoming a wealthy person”), modernist (“making a career”) or postmodernist (“self-realization”) value discourses (Sokurianska, 2006). Our goal was to reveal the peculiarities of veteran students’ value preferences in higher education versus the value priorities of Ukrainian students more broadly. Ukrainian and international studies conducted by the Department of Sociology of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University from 1991 till 2017 indicate an increasing modernization and post-modernization of the value consciousness of Ukrainian students, as well as students of Russia, Belarus, and other post-soviet countries (Arbenina & Sokurianska 2012).

In our study, it was established that Ukrainian veterans-turned-students aim at earning a higher education diploma, as this opens opportunities for making a career, achieving an officer’s rank and, as a result, obtaining high-paying work. Thus, these students’ values are modernist and traditionalist. The traditionalist (materialistic, according to R. Inglehart) perception of education is reflected in the response of Participant 3:

“Higher education, first of all, is necessary in order to have food and drink...”

While Participant 4 said:

“Where would anyone be without higher education? Nowhere! If you want to make good money, you need a higher education. Right? You want to get a good job—you need a higher education.”

Participant 5 emphasized that self-realization in the profession automatically entails career growth and high salaries, so all three value priorities are interrelated:

“If you choose self-realization, then this option covers all three proposed options. If a person is engaged in self-realization, then he should be both wealthy and in possession of a career.”

Stressing the importance of education for making a career, Participant 1 focused on the fact that higher education allows one to accumulate the symbolic capital of high status or prestigious social position:

“For a career, of course, higher education is needed. For example, [if] you are engaged in business, but without higher education—then there is no trust in such a person. And when they say about a person that he has five diplomas, then the opinion about him immediately becomes better”.

If we analyze the educational values of veteran students using Scheler-Rokeach's typology (Scheler, 1992) —namely the division of values into terminal (values-goals) and instrumental (values-means)—it will be noticed that veteran students, like all other Ukrainian students, perceive higher education as having both terminal and instrumental value. Nevertheless, instrumental-value discourse prevails in the estimates of veteran students. An example of perceptions about higher education having terminal and instrumental value is the response of Participant 2:

“Education is needed to do what I like. I like to study the laws. Perhaps in the future I will be a lawyer, so I study in order to develop myself and be able to change jobs. I think that every person wants to be financially secure. Self-realization is good. But wealth is better.”

Thus, the attitude of veteran students to education is a peculiar mix of traditionalist, modernist, and postmodernist axiological discourses, with an emphasis on the instrumental value of higher education. Of course, based only on the data of qualitative research, it is impossible to draw an unequivocal conclusion about whether the value consciousness of students is more modernist or traditionalist. However, this trend can be noticed. And the reason for this, according to R. Inglehart, lies in the economic crisis that has been aggravated by military actions in the Donbass. Veteran students, above all, think about physical and economic security and take higher education as its guarantee.

One of the objectives of our study was to find out how socially mature the veteran students are: are they mostly internals who rely on themselves in various life/professional situations, or externals who rely on external assistance from powerful social actors and the state? To address this topic, the following question was used in the interview: “Do you think it is possible to remove veteran students from a university due to poor academic

performance, or should the state provide them with the opportunity to graduate from a university under any circumstances?” In answers to this question, students were unanimous in their negative assessment of paternalism, believing that the latter hampers the development of personality and erodes one's sense of responsibility for solving problems on their own.

Participant 1 says:

“No need to make concessions ... Why? If a person relies on the help of the state, he will generally stop doing things later... He will just sit and wait for the state to give him things. It is necessary to teach a man, so that he will do things for himself.”

Participant 2 considers:

“Everyone has to be given the same conditions, I think. The fact [is] that ... we fulfilled a duty to the Motherland, but we took an oath. A veteran should not be given any special treatment. If a person does not study well, he must work on mistakes himself. The state has already provided benefits to pay for studies ... And what happens next is just the problem of veteran students themselves.”

Participant 3 states:

“So what happens if they are veterans? It does not make them holy persons. If veteran students are not doing anything and are not learning, why should they get a diploma?”

Veteran students' social maturity and responsibility for the fate of their country is confirmed by their answers to the questions: “What, in your opinion, may affect the development of our country? What exactly would you like to do about this?” Veteran students offered the following recipes for improving life in Ukraine: eliminate corruption; stop stealing; stop the war; enforce the laws; change harmful mentalities; and take better care of soldiers.

For example, Participant 2 believes:

“We need to completely eradicate corruption - although it is impossible to remove it completely, as practice shows, even in the most civilized countries. But at least it can be removed partially. What exactly would I like to do about this? I would not give bribes.”

Participant 3 says:

“It is necessary to steal less, to fight against corruption. And the mentality has to be changed, although it is a very, very long way... First of all, we must stop the war so that the young guys just stop dying.”

Participant 4 considers:

“You all understand what prevents our country from developing. We have a large and beautiful country. In this country, we really have everything. But if there were fewer people who were 'gluttons,' if they shared with people, then we would be fine. I would like our laws to work.”

Participant 1 states:

“What would I like to do? First of all, at least four uniforms should be given to soldiers for each two years of service, not two, as they give now... they get dirty, and it becomes scary to look at them... Two T-shirts and one uniform for a year, I think this is a mockery.”

The patriotic attitudes of our respondents also manifested in their answers to the question of whether they ever thought about emigrating from Ukraine. Only one veteran student admitted that he had thought about it, while the rest of the study participants emphasized not wanting to leave the country permanently, despite desiring to visit other countries as tourists.

For example, Participant 4 replied:

“No, I did not think about emigration. I am a patriot of my country and I love it very much. I traveled all over Ukraine and I like it very much. I would rather replace those who are in power.”

Participant 1 responded:

“No, I never wanted to emigrate. You can travel around the world, but [continue to] live here. Let's say that I am not such a patriot of our country. I just like it. I see myself neither in Spain, nor in Germany, nor anywhere else. I am a stranger there.”

Analyzing the obtained qualitative information, we have come to the conclusion that the combat experience of our respondents influenced their perception of the world, educational practices, and their plans for future life. Virtually all respondents noted that they did not regret having gained military experience.

Conclusions

The main findings of our research are the following:

1) As a result of studying the attitude of veteran students toward two training models—the transmission model and the communicative one—the hypothesis of preference for the transmission model among veteran students was not confirmed. Three participants in the study turned out to be closer to the communicative format, while the other two veteran students were more inclined toward information transmission. The results of our research could be affected by the fact that the interviewed veteran students identified themselves as either “civilians” or “civilians and military men at the same time”—that is, the military values of hierarchical interaction came to be supplanted, in their minds, by the liberal values of egalitarian social communication;

2) a contradictory set of veteran students' metacognitive skills has been revealed in our study: discipline and punctuality are combined with a preference for external control and the monitoring of activities by authoritative social actors; this may account for veteran students' inability to learn effectively online; distance learning requires developed metacognitive skills in students (i.e., self-control and self-monitoring of learning activities, the ability to independently set and solve educational problems);

3) the instrumental perception of higher education prevails in the estimates of veteran students; for them, higher education is primarily a way to solve such issues as

material wealth and career building; the choice of materialistic values such as physical and economic security is not surprising, especially for actors experiencing the transition from tumultuous military to peaceful civilian life.

In the future, it will be necessary to carry out a differentiated analysis of student veterans' preferences for educational process, in order to identify the correlations between different forms of military identity (stable, situational or mixed) and the choice of transmission or communicative training models. A study of the effectiveness of the training of veteran students in various formats of online education (e-learning, smart-education, m-learning, etc.) should be conducted, and the data obtained should be compared with the results of their training in traditional classroom formats, in order to identify what educational context is optimal for them.

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