Educational emigration: challenges and threats for preserving educational leadership in Ukraine

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Abstract Liberalization of the leading countries’ migration policy towards attracting additional intellectual capital as a factor for ensuring the development of sustainable innovation economy creates significant challenges for Ukraine in the context of preserving its educational leadership. The processes of students’ academic mobility growth as well as the threat of reduction of the human capital, the loss of leadership of Ukrainian higher education institutions in giving competitive educational services during education and internships in the context of Ukraine’s integration into the European educational space and Bologna process are intensified. The problem of educational emigration is explored thoroughly. We consider educational emigration deliberately as an independent form, a separate kind of migration, a different one from the “brain drain”. The paper analyses the trends and dynamics as well as the retrospective analysis of the main causes of educational emigration of Ukrainian citizens. The continued high demand of Ukrainian citizens for higher education is emphasized. At the same time, the fact that more and more Ukrainians realize their aspirations to pursue higher education in foreign universities as modern leaders in education, is pointed out. This fact is evidenced clearly by an illustrative example, that disproportionately high rate of reducing the number of national higher education institutions’ students in relation to the dynamics of the general number of school graduates. The main causes of educational emigration are explained by the authors, first of all, by dissatisfaction with the quality of life in Ukraine and in addition, in difficulties due to monetizing of the knowledge and professional skills and competencies of the higher education institutions’ graduates. The main positive and negative consequences of the educational emigration for Ukraine in terms of their impact on the possibility of preserving its intellectual potential for innovation development of the national economy are analysed in the article. The reform in the sphere of education aiming at enhancing national higher education institutions as well as strengthening their leadership position in the educational space is defined as an indispensable part of the background for creating the integrated governing state policy. The latter is aimed at creating proper conditions favourable for professional fulfillment of the individuals with higher education along with the increasing prestige and image of the intellectual work.

1 Introduction

Intellectually and professionally qualified staff with advanced mental and analytical skills, well-developed ability to respond timely to today’s world trends of development, the individual with high-level self-organization, self-control and morality is a characteristic feature of highly developed countries of the world regarding formation their national economic system. It is the intelligent individual who determines the competitiveness of world economic systems and provides the background for the wealth of nations; this person is
regarded as the key resource contributing to countries’ economic development. Nowadays, intelligence turned out to be the factor determining country’s own pace in its long-term development as well. Country’s ability to use effectively its own intellectual resource along with attracting from abroad determines its possibilities and position, i.e. to be one of the leading countries in the world economy or to occupy a place on the periphery. That is the reason why most developed countries of the world are guided in their migration policy by the creation of favourable conditions to attract additional intellectual capital (Kolesnyk and Cherkasov 2018).

The overwhelming majority of the countries are aware of the fact that educational programs are turning gradually into the best resource for further recruiting of skilled staff. It contributed to the accelerated development of transnational higher education which leads to increasing academic mobility and attracting foreign students. In its turn, it has become the background for the emergence of one more form of intellectual migration, the so-called “circulation of intelligence”. We regard it as cyclic (periodic) migration of citizens abroad for the purpose of the study and further work when they come back to their homeland and have better professional position due to the acquired skills and experience gained during their stay in the recipient country (Trokhymchuk 2013).

One of the components of Ukraine’s national policy is its integration into the world and European economic spaces and consequently participation in migration processes, i.e. massive interstate displacements. Modern challenges and threats to Ukraine’s economic growth define new tasks in shaping the structure of the national economy and put forward new requirements to regulate emigration processes, including in the sphere of education. The latter is characterized by rapid growth in recent years. The main threat to the donor country is the risk of losing its intellectual potential, aging of the population because the young people leave for Europe to get an education. We can state that educational migration has transformed into emigration through education.

Unfortunately, the international process of intelligence movement in the state gives us grounds to characterize it as a donor country. Economic reforms in the country are mainly focused on regulating the extent of official unemployment rate through the promotion of inefficient employment. There is still no mechanism elaborated to regulate educational emigration, the one which would contribute to the formation educating highly skilled professionals, the accumulation of intellectual capital, increase of scientific and technical potential in our country.

Paying tribute to a rather high level of education among the population of Ukraine, it should be noted that because of various political, economic and social problems, it constantly loses its professional and scientific elite. The lack of a balance between formation of a staff policy for highly skilled professionals and their training system causes an obvious gap between the training of skilled staff and their involvement in the work for the national economy.

2 Trends, dynamics, and reasons for educational emigration from Ukraine

The early 1990s in Ukraine were marked by gaining independence and at the same time by significant deterioration of the demographic situation, in particular, a rapid drop in the birth rate. Since 1990 and the next 10 years, the annual rate of birth rate decline ranged from 4% to 5.5%. The lowest fertility indicator was noted in the period from 1999 to 2003, with its minimum absolute value in 2001. It was that very year when only 376 thousand children were born (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2018).

At the same time, Ukrainian citizens demonstrated a significant increase in the demand for higher education in this very period. The willingness of the young people to become students was satisfied both by the old state and newly created private higher educational institutions. Since 1993 the number of higher education institutions and their students was constantly growing. The largest number of higher education institutions of all levels of accreditation (technical schools, colleges, institutes, academies, universities) was in the 2003-2004 AY when there were 1009 in total. Besides some changes in the structure of higher education institutions took place. Since 1990-2000 AY the number of colleges and technical schools and their students started to decrease gradually. Instead the number of students and higher education institutions (institutes, academies, and universities) providing Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees increased. It is important to note that starting from 2006-2007 AY and during the next five academic years the number of such educational institutions exceeded almost 2.5 times the similar indicator for the 1990-1991 AY. However, 2011-2012 AY and the following seven ones some negative dynamics in the number of higher education institutions providing Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in education is observed. The process was the most active in the 2014-2015 AY when the number of such higher educational institutions reduced by almost 15% compared with the corresponding indicator of the previous academic year. After that, the situation became relatively stable (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2018).

Comparing ten-year dynamics of the number of students who got school-leaving certificate for full secondary education and the number of students studying on Bachelor’s and Master’s educational programs (Table 1) we can state that a relatively constant decrease in the number of graduates of schools, the decline in the
number of students is disproportionately high. Fewer students continue their studies at higher educational institutions in Ukraine after leaving schools.

Based on the data given it is possible to define at least two problems of the national system of education. They arise after graduating from secondary schools: some graduates are unable to pursue their studies at higher education institutions due to the certain social and financial problems while the others are striving for obtaining professional higher education abroad.

In the 2016-2017 AY there were 77424 Ukrainian citizens studying at foreign universities. Given that about 900 thousand students were studying in day-time programs in Ukrainian higher education institutions (universities, academies, and institutes of all forms of ownership), the share of those who study abroad was around 8% of the total number of 900 thousand. We can state that the number of Ukrainians studying abroad increased more than three times from 24,104 to 77,424 in the period of the past nine years. Poland, Russia, Germany, Canada, Czech Republic, Italy, USA, Spain, Austria, France, Slovakia are the most preferred countries. These are host countries for more than 90% of all Ukrainians studying abroad (CEDOS Analytical Centre 2018).

The significant increase in the number of Ukrainian students is noticed in the Czech Republic. To compare, at the beginning of 2000 there were only 300 students from Ukraine, now there are 10 times more. The studies conducted by the Institute of Sociology in the Czech Republic on the reasons for choosing it for study by Ukrainian students showed that the choice of the country is defined by the high level of education quality and the opportunity to get a free higher education. A student who is able to study in the Czech language has the same conditions to study at the institutions of higher education as the Czech citizens do. More than one third, i.e. 37% have plans to stay in the Czech Republic after graduation (Schur 2018).

Table 1 below reports the providing professional education according to “Bachelor” and “Master” levels of education.

| Academic year | Fluctuation in the number of pupils with the school-leaving certificate for comprehensive secondary education, general educational establishments (compared to the previous academic years) | Reduction in the number of students of higher education institutions, providing training according to “Bachelor” and “Master” levels of education (compared to the previous academic years) |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2008/09       | 40                                                                                                                                                                                              | 8.0                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2009/10       | 36                                                                                                                                                                                              | 119.3                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2010/11       | 27                                                                                                                                                                                              | 115.4                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2011/12       | 149                                                                                                                                                                                             | 175.0                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2012/13       | 114                                                                                                                                                                                             | 129.9                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2013/14       | 25                                                                                                                                                                                              | 101.2                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2014/15       | 57                                                                                                                                                                                              | 285.7                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2015/16       | 18                                                                                                                                                                                              | 62.8                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 2016/17       | 18                                                                                                                                                                                              | 5.8                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 2017/18       | 8                                                                                                                                                                                                | 39.4                                                                                                                                                                                         |

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2018)

One can suggest that one of the reasons for educational emigration intensification is the desire of Ukrainians to get more prestigious education than the one that can be provided by educational institutions of the country of their origin. In particular, none of the Ukrainian higher education institutions was ranked in the Top 200 Best Universities of the World (The World University Rankings) published by the Times Higher Education in accordance with 2017-2018 years results.

At the same time, based on the survey conducted by the CEDOS Analytical Centre, the largest number of Ukrainian students went abroad to Poland, Russia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Italy, Spain, Canada, and Bulgaria. The educational institutions (except for Canada, Italy and Spain) are not presented at The World University Rankings. Thus, we consider that the argument of the prestige of education is not crucial for Ukrainians when they make a positive decision about educational emigration.

The main reasons for Ukrainian school-leavers to choose foreign educational institutions for further studies are:
- their desire to stay in the host country as permanent residents after graduation from higher education institution. Five or six years-period of studies is enough for the students of Ukrainian origin “to get
into” the society of the country, learn the language, legislation and thus they are fully adapted to the new environment before beginning work life;

- shortcomings and weak points of the national educational system of Ukraine which give rise to the crisis of confidence in all educational institutions. In particular, there can be attributed, first of all, theoretical training is a priority (it should be noted, that frankly speaking it is quite fundamental) over the formation of practical skills. Second, Ukrainian curricula are less flexible in the formation of future specialists’ desired competencies compared with the ones in foreign institutions of higher education. It results in reducing significantly the number of graduates who work in their specialty. Third, the outdated physical infrastructure (especially of higher technical education institutions) and poor library funds along with bad information provision make the process of obtaining “modern” knowledge more complicated. Fourth, corruption component in the Ukrainian higher education institutions causes the fact that Ukrainian school-leavers make a decision of choosing the university in favour of the European ones because of no corruption element there. Fifth, there is almost no mechanism created for ensuring the quality of education in Ukraine; in its turn, it affects directly employment opportunities of the most graduates of Ukrainian universities. At the same time, the worst situation is in the institutions of vocational education which resulted in the significant shortage of labour force. Sixth, the lack of a holistic LLL system which makes the processes of advanced training, retraining, non-formal education, etc. much more complicated.

- active advertising activity of foreign educational institutions at educational exhibitions in Ukraine, the policy of their responsible attitude to their graduates in the aspect of creating a network of professional contacts and employment after successful graduation of higher education institution, a special system of reward for the most successful and talented students;

- “price-and-knowledge quality” ratio. It happens rather often that Ukrainians get more modern knowledge during their studying abroad and education fee is not higher than the one in the domestic higher education institutions.

Ukrainian citizens studying at Ph.D. programs deserve particular attention. Despite the lack of complete statistical information, according to studies carried out by the CEDOS Analytical Centre on the data of 14 countries, 1600 Ukrainians studied Ph.D. programs in these countries in the 2015-2016 AY. It should be noted that in view of paid access to data, the US, Canada, and the UK are not included in the list although they are hypothetically as attractive for young Ukrainian scientists as France or even Germany. However, even such incomplete data make it possible to draw conclusions on the countries which are preferred by Ukrainians willing to obtain a scientific degree. The number of Ukrainians who study Ph.D. programs in Switzerland and the Czech Republic has doubled in the last 8 years. The biggest number of Ukrainian graduate students is in Germany; their number has increased these years by 20% these years. As for Poland, it has the highest growth rate and it has reached 40% in the last three years (CEDOS Analytical Center 2017).

At the same time, the number of Ph.D. applicants is reducing significantly in Ukraine. The most negative dynamics is observed since 2014. To compare, in 2013 the number of Ph.D. applicants was 31482 people and in 2017 it decreased by more than 20% (24,786 people) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2017).

The main reason for the lack of motivation of Ukrainian citizens to realize their scientific potential in their country and their intensive emigration moods is explained firstly by financial insecurity. The latter is the main reason for a range of others, including unfavourable working conditions and difficulties with professional self-realization. According to the official statistics in 2017, 74.3% of employees in the field of professional, scientific and technical activities received monthly wages up to UAH 10,000 (it is a little more than EUR 300) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2018). It is a paradox but an average salary in the field of science is lower than the one in the country’s economy.

3 Potential consequences of educational emigration for Ukraine

When we research the processes of educational emigration, we regard it consciously as a separate form from the “brain drain”. Educational emigration is transformed into the form of the “brain drain” only in the case when a student decides not to return to the country of origin after graduation.

The growth of educational migration is a direct consequence of globalization processes and a result of the migration policy liberalization by most countries of the world in relation to foreign students. The latter is considered to be a valuable resource for replenishing their own human capital, that has already adapted to living in the host country.

We believe that it is necessary to take into account the importance of Ukrainian students for the main recipient countries during our analysis of the potential consequences of educational emigration for the national economy of Ukraine. Indeed, this factor will determine largely the degree of liberalization of the migration
policy of the countries in relation to the further employment of foreign graduates. In its turn, it will affect their mood and intentions about returning to the country of their origin.

There is only a little more than 1% of Ukrainians who study in countries other than their own. At the same time, the value of Ukrainian students is different for each host country. In particular, the number of Ukrainian citizens who get an education at universities in Germany does not exceed 3%. At the same time, the share of Ukrainian students in Poland in 2016-2017 AY was 55% of the total number of foreign students. Given that most of them pay for studies and accommodation by themselves, this fact can be seen as important investments for Poland to offset the demographic decline and the decreasing of Polish youth because of leaving the country with the purpose to enter higher education institutions in other EU countries. The situation is similar in Slovakia where the number of Ukrainian students according to preliminary data of 2018-2019 AY, reached one-third of the total number of foreign students. The only difference is that vast majority studies at the expense of the Slovak budget (that is, they bring additional budgetary funding to Slovak universities), whereas they cover living expenses on their own. The rapid growth of the number of Ukrainian students is also observed in Bulgarian universities, especially in Bachelor programs where graduates with certificates of Ukrainian schools make up almost 20% of all those who have completed secondary education outside of Bulgaria. Russia has no tangible effect on the expenses of Ukrainian students, but it has a significant political role for the Russian Federation. In the 2014-2015 AY (the period when the political conflict between the two countries was in active stage), the quotas for Ukrainian student’s enrolment in the institutions of higher education of the Russian Federation were increased tenfold up to 3000 students. However, over the past three years, there were hardly 500 people enrolled (CEDOS Analytical Centre 2018). Based on the above, it can be predicted that the institutions of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe will continue to pursue an active recruiting policy towards Ukrainian students in order to maintain or even increase their number.

Educational migration, just like any process, has its positive and negative consequences for the donor country’s economy. We need to note that, educational migration has its specific features and unlike labour one it does not create numerous advantages i.e. the most significant positive effects such as improving country's balance of payments due to the growth of private transfers of labour migrants and tension reduction in the national labour market in the form of reducing unemployment. The main positive results of educational emigration are acquiring “relevant” knowledge, gaining professional experience and expanding skills, establishing information and communication channels for further cooperation, an additional motivation for studying foreign languages. This is a significant incentive for domestic institutions of higher education to increase the level of competitiveness in the provision of educational services. At the same time, the positive effects of educational emigration are realized under the condition if educational migrants return to the country of origin after education and training programs. Otherwise, educational emigration is transformed into a “brain drain” with all the negative consequences of this type of migration. Questionnaires conducted by the National Institute for Strategic Studies have shown that approximately 17% of Ukrainian migrants, of whom 55.9% are young people under the age of 34, have neither opportunity nor desire to return back to Ukraine (Malynovs’ka 2011). Based on this, we can argue that soon Ukraine will experience all the negative consequences of educational emigration to the full if this trend continues. It will be manifested primarily in the “outflow of capital” in its social (demographic and intellectual) dimensions. In its turn, the loss of a certain share of the working-age population will be damaging to the national labour market, it will affect negatively the innovative and intellectual development of the state and will inevitably cause the destruction of the intellectual potential of the whole nation. As for the national educational sector, reduction in the number the students as a result of educational emigrations will be destructive for the branch. Firstly, the number of budget-funded student places will be reduced, as well as the total amount of public funding for higher education institutions. Secondly, it leads to potential loss of the funds from students in contract-based forms of education. And thirdly, the number of educational institutions will be decreased. The mentioned problem can be mitigated in case if the Ukrainian state policy along with one of higher education institutions aiming at creating favourable conditions for increasing educational immigration to Ukraine is activated. At the same time, it will inevitably lead to “blurring” of the Ukrainian ethnic group and will be threatening for preserving its national identity.

4 Conclusions

Summing up the above analysed results and findings, we would like to highlight that the main motivating factor for educational emigration is not the extent of dissatisfaction of the youth with the state of national higher education. Instead, these are inappropriate living conditions in Ukraine altogether, the lack of interest of the authorities in attracting highly-educated people able to contribute to the development of the state. Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to take a range of actions aiming at establishing macroeconomic stability and improving the state economy. These are labour rights protection, the creation of high-performing jobs, decent salary, social guarantees, state support for lifelong learning programs, etc. Higher education obtained abroad is considered as a
potential opportunity to achieve a higher quality of living conditions after graduation, to realize one’s own professional potential outside of Ukraine.

Consequently, the more intellectual effort will be required when entering the institution of higher education in the country of origin, the more often the acquisition of higher education abroad will be explained by the search for better education opportunities.

Enhancing the quality of national education should be a part of the comprehensive state policy on improving the quality of life in Ukraine, creating conditions for the professional self-realization of individuals with higher education, and extending the prestige of the intellectual work. In our opinion, among the areas of quality assurance education, there should be the following. Firstly, to overcome the corruption component in the educational space by further development of the tools that proved to be effective: External Independent Testing (EIT) including for enrolment for Master’s degree programs, competitive distribution of the budget-funded student places in the Masters’ programs etc. Secondly, the introduction of new innovative forms of education, first and foremost the distance one. Thirdly, the development of new standards of higher education and new educational programs in accordance with current realities and prospects of certain professions. This will create additional opportunities for Ukrainian citizens including those who have been educated abroad, to make full use of their professional potential on the national labour market.

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