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# A UKRAINIAN STUDENT VISIT AT AN AUSTRIAN SCHOOL IN TIMES OF WAR: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE EDUCATION

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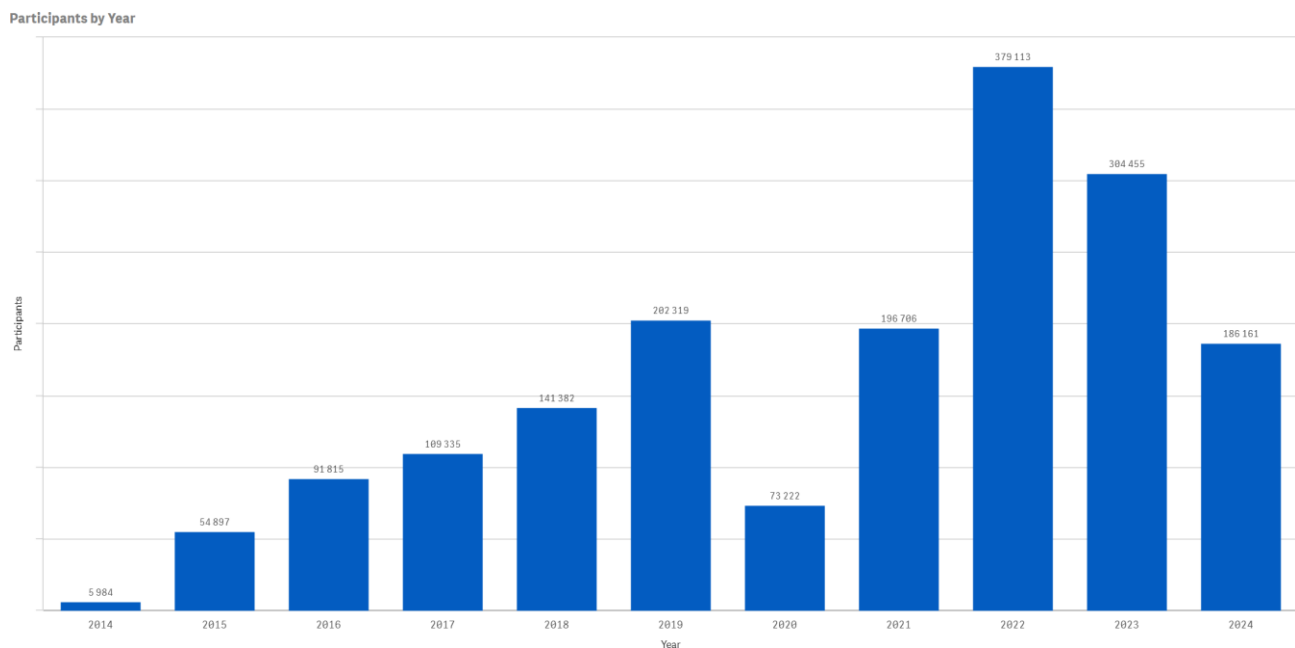
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*This paper explores the impact of short-term international educational exchange programs amidst conflict. It builds on the premise that intercultural interactions are crucial for developing and cultivating mutual understanding, respect, collaboration, and peace. More specifically, the manuscript focuses on a specific case study where Ukrainian students visited an Austrian school amidst ongoing conflict. It examines the program through the lens of both Ukrainian and Austrian students. Methodologically, we collected empirical data through questionnaires which contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The qualitative data was analysed through triangulated coding with three coders, deriving the main and subcategories inductively. The findings highlight significant benefits for Ukrainian students through cultural immersion and interactions with Austrian peers. Despite challenges such as language barriers, the short-term exchange contributed to broadening perspectives and nurtured intercultural competencies. The study underscores the importance of structured planning, language support, and inclusive activities in optimizing educational exchange programs to promote mutual understanding in multicultural settings with the overall aim of contributing to a more peaceful coexistence of humanity, which is the primary goal of peace education. Finally, the paper suggests avenues for developing future initiatives to enhance peace education through cross-cultural learning.*

**Keywords:** student exchange, Ukraine, Austria, student experiences, peace education, war.

## INTRODUCTION

The temporary mobility of people, in particular of students, which is the focus of this article, has a long tradition. One first big movement started in the 17th century. Starting in Britain, the so-called “Grand Tour” became a regular feature of aristocratic education in Europe (Chaney, 1998). Although it was primarily restricted to the higher nobility and caused by the enthusiasm for classical culture (with a focus on Italy), it established mobility in education. Today, for example, the EU has established “student mobility” as part of the ERASMUS+ program (<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/pupil-mobility>). More than 1,745,000 children and young people have taken part in this program alone since 2014 (see Fig. 1).



**Figure 1:** Participants in school-based Erasmus+ programs 1.1.2014 – 31.5.2024 (Source: Erasmus+ data dashboard)

Today, the need for exchange programs is usually associated in the literature with globalization and associated social developments. Our world is socially, economically, and technologically highly interconnected (Ritzer, 2007). The accelerating process of globalization has positive (Maringe et al. 2013) and negative (Cantle, 2012) sides and

effects. One consequence of globalization is a huge increase in our exposure to cultural diversity (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Economic developments and technological transformation have increased global flows of people, and migration is increasing for several reasons, involving people of all races, classes, and ages. Especially, the number of people displaced by war and natural disaster has increased rapidly during the last 15 years. This and the global interconnectivity make demands upon us all, at least in the field of education, if we are to respond appropriately. School education should help the next generation, in particular, to prepare for challenges of all kinds. “The ability to adapt quickly and effectively to unfamiliar cultural environments is becoming one of the key skills demanded by an internationalized economy and rapidly changing domestic context” (Campbell, 2000, p. 31).

In this context, active experiences are of crucial importance (Dewey, 1938). The best way to understand the unfamiliar is to actively engage with it. Intercultural competence grows from intercultural experiences (Huggins, 2015). Student exchange programs are one way of making this possible.

The theory behind modern exchange programs (of varying duration) is usually based on two concepts: expanded immersion and glocalization. Expanded immersion (Swain & Johnson, 1997) was originally strongly connected to language learning. The didactic idea is to expose learners to the subject matter as comprehensively as possible. This relates to content aspects, objects, time/duration, and location. In the context of exchange programs, it is primarily the temporary change of location that specifies the learning experience. The second concept, glocalization, emphasizes another fundamentally spatial dimension, namely the interaction between the global and the local within a globalized world. Roudomentof (2016) defines it in the following way: “Glocalization indicates that the growing importance of continental and global levels is occurring together with the increasing salience of local and regional levels. Tendencies toward homogeneity and centralization appear alongside tendencies toward heterogeneity and decentralization. [...]. It points to the interconnectedness of the global and local levels.” (Roudomentof, 2016, p. 9). The idea in the context of school exchange programs are that a well-prepared and accompanied, saturated stay in another

(foreign) place within a structurally similar context (or the arrangement of formal learning in schools with its typical configurations) creates a fruitful learning setting for experiencing and reflecting on an unfamiliar environment. On the one hand, the pupils are familiar with school, which is similar all over the world. On the other hand, the language, subjects, procedures, and much more differ from what they are used to at home. Thus, a familiar and an unfamiliar local context create experiences and reflective learning opportunities to foster intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2009). The origin of these ideas can be drawn back at least to Wilhelm von Humboldt (see below).

Kendall and Rodger (2015) identify a list of advantages drawn from exchange and learning away programs, most important relationships, both peer relationships and those between staff and students, positive impact on resilience, self-confidence and wellbeing, and on knowledge, skills and understanding (p. iii-v).

In addition to these educational aspects, another facet has played a role in the context of exchange programs, at least since the Second World War: that of temporarily relieving and normalizing the everyday lives of students. As mentioned, school provides a familiar structure that can convey a sense of security. If children and young people can now be taken out of a potentially traumatic context (natural disasters, wars), at least temporarily, there is hope that this will provide at least temporary relief. At the same time, pupils at the host school are given the opportunity to come into direct contact with the experiences of those affected.

In the context of this project, the potentially traumatic context is defined by Russia's war against Ukraine. Thus, one goal of the school exchange project is to experience peace.

The concept of peace, defined not merely as the absence of war but as a pursuit of harmonious human coexistence, has evolved throughout history. It encompasses resolving conflicts peacefully, achieving justice, harmonizing with nature, and fostering civic engagement. Strategies to attain and sustain peace include strength, justice, transformation, politics, sustainability, and peace education. Education plays a crucial role in nurturing understanding, tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution among

individuals and communities (Harris & Morrison, 2004, p. 13-20). The UNESCO preamble underscores the importance of constructing peace within human minds, recognizing that peace education is fundamental. According to its preamble (UNESCO, 1945), its mission is to foster peace and security through collaboration among nations in education, science, and culture, promoting justice, the rule of law, and human rights worldwide. Similarly, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNGA, 1948) emphasizes education's role in promoting understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all peoples to support the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts.

Peace education is both a philosophy as well as a practical approach (Morrison, 2012), and intercultural exchange is one way of promoting tolerance among nations, which prevents conflict and war. Mutual understanding and cultural curiosity are important components of Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1767-1835) philosophy of education (e.g., Humboldt, 1792; 1793; 1809). His educational ideal of *Bildung* includes exposure to "a manifoldness of situations" (Bacher, 2023). Humboldt's concept entails encountering diversity in educational content, personal experiences, and social interactions, fostering curiosity and respect for cultural differences. By engaging with diverse perspectives through education, travel, and interpersonal relationships, individuals develop empathy, tolerance, and a holistic understanding of the world. This approach not only expands intellectual horizons but also cultivates a mindset that values multiculturalism and inclusion. Humboldt argues that embracing diversity prevents discriminatory attitudes by normalizing cultural differences and promoting a cosmopolitan worldview. Consequently, individuals are encouraged to transcend their comfort zones and, thereby, contribute to a society where tolerance and appreciation prevail over prejudice and discrimination (Bacher, 2024, p. 8-10). Thus, cultural exchange programs are an important component of peace education. Given the ongoing war in Ukraine and its uncertain development, the topic of fostering peace through educational field trips abroad is currently of high relevance.

The paper delves into the potential benefits of short-term educational exchange opportunities to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and a peaceful coexistence of

humanity. It focuses on a particular exchange program where Ukrainian students visited a school in Vienna, Austria, for a week, despite the challenging circumstances in their home country. The structure of the paper is organized as follows: It begins with an overview of the context of long-term and short-term educational opportunities abroad for Ukrainian students during wartime. Following this, the paper introduces the research methodology employed for the empirical study conducted. Subsequently, a summary of the analysed data is presented, followed by a discussion of the findings. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the study's outcomes, and avenues for further research in this area are explored.

**Research Objectives.** The goal of the empirical part of this paper is to analyse and discuss a short-term educational visit of Ukrainian students to an Austrian secondary school during wartime through the lens of both the Ukrainian and Austrian students involved. It further aims to provide insights into the experiences and potential benefits and challenges of such opportunities. Through this case study, the paper will contribute to the understanding of how temporary educational exchanges can support Ukrainian students in maintaining their educational trajectory amidst ongoing conflict. Given the rarity of such short-term exchange programs, the findings of this paper can serve as a blueprint for developing future exchange initiatives during periods of conflict. If organized and conducted effectively, such programs can offer opportunities for mutual exchange and, therefore, promote peaceful coexistence of humanity.

### **Educational Opportunities Abroad for Ukrainian Students during Wartime.**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has deeply impacted the educational landscape in Ukraine and promoted the need for innovative strategies to maintain educational continuity. The war has forced many Ukrainian families to make difficult decisions regarding their children's education, which has resulted in a significant number of students who have sought educational opportunities abroad. For various reasons, including language similarities, a significant number of Ukrainian students have resettled in Poland (cf. Herbst & Sitek, 2023, p. 576). Meanwhile, those who remain in Ukraine face difficult circumstances. According to Chovpan (2023) the

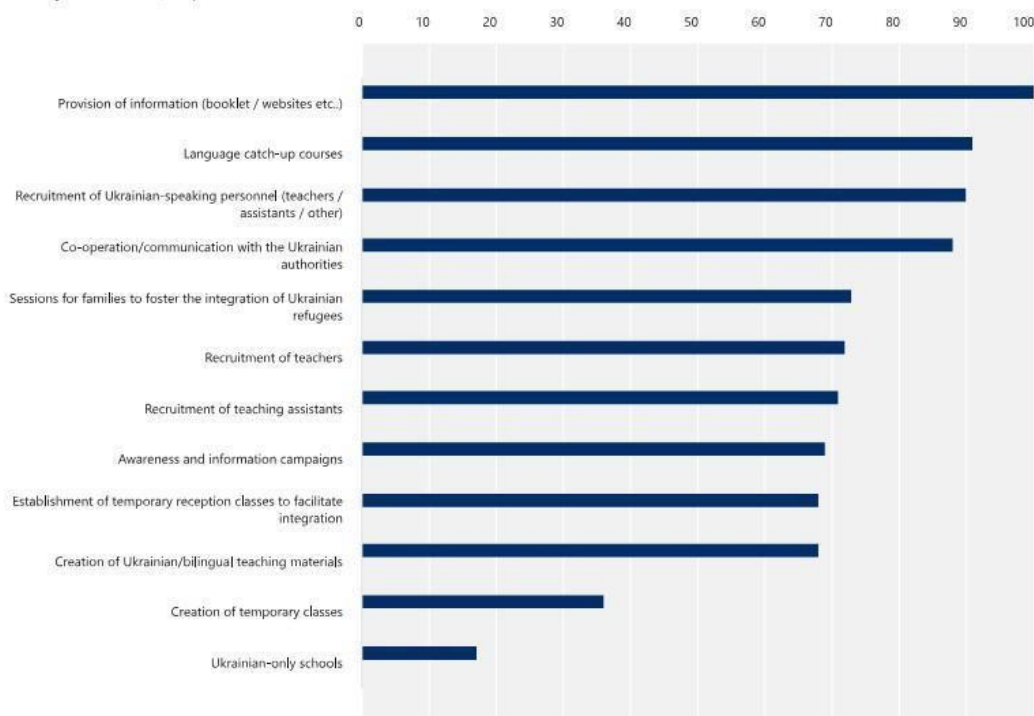


“inability to accurately predict when it will be possible to return home [...] forces people to preserve their children's future peculiarly, preserving their place in Ukrainian schools” (p. 12).

Recent research highlights the challenges and adaptations required for integrating Ukrainian students into new educational environments. The OECD (2023a) reports that the majority of its member states have established temporary reception classes to support the integration of Ukrainian refugee students into their education systems. In primary education, such classes are established in 68% of OECD countries (OECD, 2023a, p. 26). This trend underscores the importance of structured and supportive environments to facilitate the academic and social integration of displaced students. Figure 2 provides an overview of measures to support the enrollment of Ukrainian refugee students in schools in OECD countries.

**Figure 1. Measures to support the enrolment of Ukrainian refugee students in schools in OECD countries (2023)**

Primary education, in per cent of countries



**Note:** The figure only includes instances where countries answer "Yes" and then excludes "No", "Not applicable" and "Missing" answers. 3 out of 28 countries have not answered this question. Readers are kindly invited to consult the database on "Ensuring a continued learning for Ukrainian refugees" for further information.

Measures are ranked in descending order of the share of countries and other participants adopting them at the national level.

**Source:** OECD (2023) [Survey on Ensuring Continued Learning of Ukrainian Refugee Students](#)

Figure 2: OECD, 2023a, p. 26.

The European Commission points out that in the majority of the European countries “education authorities support the recruitment of, or collaboration with, Ukrainian teachers” (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022). An example of collaboration between Austrian and Ukrainian teachers is described in this paper.

In Austria, a significant number of Ukrainian refugee students have been integrated into Viennese classrooms, as compared to rural areas (Woltran, Hassani & Schwab, 2023, p. 12f). The situation of Ukrainian refugee students in Vienna has been analyzed by Woltran, Hassani, and Schwab (2023). The researchers highlight the need for additional language support and the dual burden of adapting to new educational systems while maintaining connections to their Ukrainian schooling through remote learning (Woltran, Hassani & Schwab, 2023, p. 8).

Despite the extensive research on long-term integration and adaption of Ukrainian students in foreign educational systems, studies focusing on short-term educational opportunities abroad remain scarce. This gap largely exists due to the rarity of such opportunities during times of war. One notably short-term program has been reported by the Austrian European Office, which is part of the Viennese Board of Education (Bildungsdirektion Wien). This opportunity enabled forty Ukrainian students from a school in Kiev, Ukraine, along with ten accompanying persons, to visit two secondary schools in Vienna, Austria, for a week. During the visit, the students participated in regular classes alongside the local students, engaged in extracurricular activities (e.g., sport events), and went on field trips (e.g., sightseeing tours) (cf. Europabüro, 2024).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The goal of this form of exchange was primarily to enable the Ukrainian students to attend a school for a week in a carefree manner and without having to worry about air raid alarms. Since the beginning of the conflict, lessons have had to be shortened in Ukrainian schools to enable students and teachers to take shelter. Students and teachers have had to cope with symptoms of trauma (OECD, 2023b, 20).



From April 22 to April 26, 2024, 20 students aged between thirteen and sixteen from Kiev joined a secondary school in Vienna. Around 900 students attend the specific Austrian school, taught by more than 80 teachers. The Ukrainian students were accompanied by their school's principal and four teachers, including one responsible for communication in English. The Austrian school and the school's parent association supported their visit. At the Viennese school, the Ukrainians were given lunch meals. Additionally, they received weekly tickets for the public transport system and a goodie bag with the school's logo, including bookmarks, flask, and pencils.

The Ukrainian students arrived at the school on Monday at nine o'clock and were welcomed with a musical performance and impulse films. Students of the Austrian school subsequently showed the Ukrainian students the school building before they were welcomed in the respective classes they had been assigned to (two Ukrainian students in Austrian classrooms). After two lessons, they were brought to the school's assembly hall, where they had the pleasure of viewing a school musical performance. On Tuesday they participated in the lessons according to the timetable of the Austrian school classes. In the afternoon they were accompanied to the Prater in Vienna. After joining two lessons at school on Wednesday, they were picked up for a city tour through Vienna. Multilingual Austrian students assisted with the translations. In the afternoon an optional extra-curricular sports activity was offered, namely frisbee training. The program for Thursday consisted of classes in the morning, lunch, and an excursion to Schönbrunn. This afternoon parent-teacher meetings were held at the Austrian school. On Friday, their last day, the Ukrainian students joined the Austrian classes again before saying good-bye to their host students. On this day, twenty younger Ukrainian students, aged between ten and thirteen, joined four lessons each. However, these additional, younger students do not form part of the research conducted for this study. After lunch, the Ukrainian students left the school.

Within three weeks following the intercultural exchange in Austria, we surveyed both the Ukrainian and the Austrian students about their experiences with the school visit. The sample ( $n = 70$ ) comprised 19 Ukrainian students and 51 Austrian students.

We conducted two separate questionnaires (one for the Ukrainian and one for the Austrian students). The Ukrainian questionnaire was provided in Ukrainian, while the Austrian version was in German, allowing each group to respond in their respective native languages to capture their emotions accurately. Also, the symbolic meaning of the Ukrainian language and the linguistic identification under the current circumstances during wartime plays an important role, as pointed out by Warditz and Meir (2024). The results of the Ukrainian students were sent back to Austria by their English-speaking Ukrainian teacher and then translated into English.

Both the questionnaire for the Ukrainian as well as the Austrian students contained three open-ended questions as well as two closed ones. The open-ended questions given to the Ukrainian students were as follows:

- (1) What did you find interesting, fascinating, or surprising about your time at an Austrian school? Please concentrate on three aspects and write a paragraph (4-8 lines) to each of these points. Did you join activities with the Austrian students? If yes, which ones, and how did you experience them?
- (2) How did you interact with the Austrian students? What did you talk about? How did you communicate?
- (3) How would you rate this experience for the Austrian students? In what way could the Austrian students profit from your visit at their school?

The closed-ended questions for the Austrian students were:

- (4) Would you recommend this form of exchange? (yes-no question) and
- (5) Did you like your stay with the Austrian students? (Likert scale ranging from 1-10). The open-ended questions presented to the Austrian students were similar:

- (1) What did you find interesting, fascinating, or surprising about the week with the Ukrainian students? Please concentrate on three aspects and write a paragraph (4-8 lines) to each of these points. Were there any joint activities? If yes, which ones, and how did you experience them?
- (2) How did you interact with the Ukrainian students? What did you talk about? How did you communicate?

(3) How would you rate this experience for the guests? In what way could the Ukrainian students profit from their visit?

The closed-ended questions for the Austrian students were:

(4) Would you recommend this form of exchange? (yes-no question) and

(5) Did you like the weeks with the Ukrainian students? (Likert scale ranging from 1-10). The resulting data was analyzed using the software MAXQDA. We conducted a qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022) through triangulated coding with three coders, deriving the main and subcategories inductively. The findings of this analysis will be detailed in the following section.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The following section provides a summary of the analysis of the students' answers in the questionnaires, including both open-ended and closed-ended questions. First, we will present the results of the Ukrainian students followed by those from the Austrian students.

### 1. Ukrainian Students' Perceptions

According to the Ukrainian students ( $n = 19$ ), the Austrian school experience was an enriching and memorable one, which provided them with opportunities to expand their knowledge, develop their independence, and immerse themselves in a new cultural environment. The Ukrainian students consistently reported that they fully enjoyed the exchange program and would recommend this form of exchange. The Ukrainian students' experiences described in the three open-ended questions will be summarized in the following subsections (1.1.-1.3.) and illustrated with citations:

#### 1.1. Overall Experience of the Ukrainian Students

Some of them indicated that they were impressed by the interactive and engaging teaching methods, the modern technological equipment, and the friendly and supportive teachers:

*"I was very interested in the Austrian school because I had the opportunity to study new subjects and expand my knowledge. I enjoyed communicating with my classmates and learning about*

*their culture and customs. I was especially impressed by the modern teaching methods and the pleasant classroom atmosphere” (Text 1).*

The Ukrainian students also noted that the classrooms were spacious and well-equipped, with specialized rooms for subjects like biology and computer science:

*“The school itself was fascinating. The school seems to be small, smaller than ours, but there is really a lot of space. There was enough space for large and interesting classes, a nice dining room and a large gym. Also, the choir and the school performances were really exciting” (Text 16).*

They enjoyed participating in activities like frisbee and volleyball with their Austrian peers, which allowed them to practice their language skills and learn about the local culture. Moreover, they were captivated by the school's unique location and the school performances featuring live music and acrobatics. The assessment system, with grades ranging from 1 to 5 (where 1 is the highest), was an interesting difference from the students' home education system:

*“It is very interesting and unusual that the school grades are "reversed" from 5 to 1, where 1 is the highest grade” (Text 12).*

## 1.2. Communication with the Austrian Students

The Ukrainian students indicated that the interactions with the Austrian students were positive, as they demonstrated openness, curiosity, and a desire to learn about each other's cultures and traditions:

*“Our interaction was friendly. We communicated in English. We talked about lessons, free time during breaks, and homework. We also shared information about our hobbies” (Text 1).*

Despite the language differences, the students found common ground and developed a sense of camaraderie, sharing their experiences and learning from each other. In some cases, they even used non-verbal communication, such as gestures, to facilitate understanding. The primary language of communication with the Austrian students was English, which allowed them to overcome the language barrier and engage in friendly conversations:

*“Thanks to the fact that we study English at school, we had the opportunity to communicate with them in an international language, I understand that my level of English is far from perfect, but*

*it was enough to be able to understand each other. For me, it became a motivation to study English in more depth” (Text 3).*

The students discussed various topics, including their respective school systems, subjects, hobbies, and cultural differences. According to the Ukrainian students, the Austrian students were welcoming and helpful, guiding them around the school and explaining the daily routines:

*“I talked to Austrian students during lessons, breaks, and extracurricular activities. We talked about different topics such as school, hobbies, music, sports, and travelling” (Text 15).*

### **1.3. Possible Benefits for the Austrian Students**

From the Ukrainian students’ perspective the exchange was also beneficial for the Austrian students, as they gained valuable insights into Ukrainian culture, traditions, and language during the visit. Accordingly, they developed intercultural communication and cooperation skills, became more open to diversity, and expanded their worldview:

*“I believe that the Austrian students also benefited from this experience. They had the opportunity to get to know Ukrainian culture and also to practice communicating in English. My visit could also help them to better understand the diversity of the world and the value of intercultural communication” (Text 16).*

The exchange allowed them to learn new perspectives, practice English, and make new friends. It was a rewarding experience that fostered mutual understanding and tolerance between the two groups:

*“Visits help them to gain a deeper understanding of different cultures, learn new language aspects and see the world through the lens of another nationality. In addition, communicating with other people can arouse interest in global issues, develop intercultural skills and support a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding” (Text 15).*

The Ukrainian students also benefited, as they had the opportunity to share their experiences, learn from their Austrian peers, and practice their language skills. Both sides expressed interest in further exchanges and visits, highlighting the positive impact of such cross-cultural interactions:

*“I would say that this experience was quite good for the Austrian students. We may have shown them some new solutions to problems, taught them a little bit of Ukrainian, and generally conveyed a lot of new information to them” (Text 17).*

## 2. Austrian Students' Perceptions

The experiences for the Austrian students (n = 51) were varied. Some of the participants found the exchange enriching, while others found it frustrating due to the language barrier and lack of integration. 41% of Austrian students indicated they would recommend this form of exchange, while 33% would not. The remaining 26% did not provide an answer. The average rating of their experience was 5.72 out of 10. Some students who did not recommend the student exchange or did not provide an answer noted that it could be beneficial with better organization, clear objectives, and appropriate didactic implementation. They suggested extending the duration of the exchange program, considering the two-day bus journey, as illustrated in the following quote:

*"I don't know exactly what the goal of this week was, so it's hard to give a recommendation. I also don't know how much of this trip was planned by our school, but I found it very interesting that they took a bus for 2 days to get here, spent 5 days in Vienna, and then took another 2 days to drive back home" (Text 5).*

The Austrian students' experiences described in the three open-ended questions will be summarized in the following subsections (2.1.-2.3.) and illustrated with citations:

### 2.1. Overall Experience of the Austrian Students

Many Austrian students found the exchange interesting, appreciating the opportunity to learn about a new culture and interact with peers from a different background. Some were particularly fascinated by the Ukrainian students' traditional clothing, language, and their ability to adapt to the new environment:

*"I found it interesting that I was able to get to know a new culture and learn how they arrived here. What surprised me was that the two Ukrainian students came in traditional clothing and showed us what they wear in their country. But what I found most fascinating was definitely the language, because there really is a big difference compared to the German language, and Ukrainian sounds really cool" (Text 8).*

However, others highlighted varying proficiency levels in the English language, which made communication challenging. Several students observed that there were few organized joint activities, leading the Ukrainian students to often keep to themselves, spending time on their phones or talking among themselves:



*“We only had one activity with them, which was a text about Austrian culture in an English class, but unfortunately, they didn't understand much because they didn't speak English very well” (Text 49).*

Some Austrian students expressed disappointment regarding the lack of meaningful interaction and felt the exchange program was not worthwhile due to the short period of time:

*“I was surprised that it was even possible to arrange such an exchange in such a short amount of time” (Text 29).*

The texts underscore the importance of effective planning and support to ensure meaningful cultural exchange and learning opportunities for all participants.

## **2.2. Communication with the Ukrainian Students**

In general, the Austrian students indicated that the level of interaction and communication with the Ukrainian students varied. Some of them were able form meaningful connections:

*“I found both of them very nice, even though one was a bit more reserved. We found a few things in common and also talked about other people. Communication went quite well because one of them spoke English very well (Text 1)”.*

Other students reported that they had limited or no interaction at all:

*“Personally, I did not converse with the two of them. However, my classmates communicated with the exchange students in German, English, and Russian” (Text 24).*

The Austrian students reported that the Ukrainian students who visited the Austrian school had varying English proficiency levels, which made communication challenging at times. Some Austrian students were able to converse with the Ukrainians in English, while others relied on Russian-speaking classmates to translate. Discussions ranged from their activities in Vienna and the school curriculum to cultural differences between Ukraine and Austria, as well as casual conversations about hobbies and interests:

*“We talked about the activities they did in Vienna and about the school. Additionally, we discussed Ukraine and Austria. Most of the time, we spoke English, but one of the two students also tried to speak German with us” (Text 38).*

Despite the language barriers, the Austrian students indicated that they made efforts to make the Ukrainian visitors feel welcome and comfortable. Nevertheless, a few students wrote that they felt uncomfortable in interacting with the Ukrainian students, citing distress or a general lack of common ground.

### 2.3. Possible Benefits and Challenges for the Ukrainian Students

The Austrian students assumed that the Ukrainian students who visited their school for a week had mixed experiences. While they were able to take a break from the war and see some of the sights and attractions in Vienna, the Austrian students assumed that the class time itself was not particularly beneficial. Due to the language barrier, they were largely unable to participate in or understand the lessons, and often just sat passively in the classroom:

*“I don't know what activities the students were offered outside of school, but I think it's sad that after a week with limited opportunities for exchange, they have to return to the war zone” (Text 31).*

Some students reported that the Ukrainian visitors seemed to be uncomfortable:

*“To be honest, I think the two of them felt rather uncomfortable in class. Being in another country with people you don't know well and having difficulty communicating is not easy for anyone (Text 19)”.*

They also emphasized logistical issues regarding the accommodation of the Ukrainian students. Providing a translator or organizing more activities outside of the classroom may have made the experience more meaningful:

*“I think they probably had a nice time and saw a lot of Vienna. Maybe it would have been better to have a translator at school who could translate for everyone or something similar. It was surely nice for them to have a break from the war” (Text 47).*

The consensus of the Austrian students seems to be that the week-long visit was not ideally structured to help the Ukrainian students, though it did offer them a temporary respite from the conflict at home. Moreover, they suggest that more thoughtful planning and a longer duration could have allowed for greater cultural exchange and more learning opportunities.

## DISCUSSION

The exchange program yielded valuable insights into the experiences of both Ukrainian and Austrian students. Ukrainian students benefited significantly from the cultural immersion, enhancing their academic and social skills while fostering cross-cultural understanding. Positive interactions with Austrian peers highlighted the potential for future collaborations and friendships. However, challenges such as language barriers and varying expectations affected the exchange's outcomes for both groups. The Austrian students' perception on the effectiveness of the program varied. While they valued that the exchange offered opportunities for intercultural learning, they believe that more support in managing language differences and organizing inclusive activities could improve future programs. Despite these challenges, the exchange contributed to broadening perspectives and nurturing intercultural competencies among participants.

The study underscores the importance of structured planning, language support, and inclusive activities in facilitating meaningful exchanges. Future initiatives can build on these insights to optimize learning experiences and promote mutual understanding in multicultural educational settings.

While some students expressed ideas about mutual exchange, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence fostered by short-time school exchange programs abroad, we found that the theme of promoting peace through these programs was not as prominent among students as initially anticipated. It is important to note that we did not explicitly prompt students to reflect on this aspect. Including their perspectives on this topic would have added valuable insights to our study. However, we consciously avoided addressing the topic of war due to the possibility of traumatization.

The obvious limitation of this study lies in its restriction to one case, respectively one specific exchange program at one school. Nevertheless, we consider this study to be an important initial contribution because of the lack of studies within this specific frame (short term exchange programs). Naturally, it would make sense for this issue to be investigated more extensively in the future.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study explored the impact of a short-term educational exchange program involving Ukrainian students visiting an Austrian school during wartime. The specific exchange program that was analysed and discussed in this study provided Ukrainian students with a valuable opportunity to experience a different educational environment and culture amidst the challenges of war. Their experiences were overwhelmingly positive and emphasized the benefits of cultural immersion, language practice, and personal growth. Ukrainian students appreciated modern teaching methods, spacious classrooms, and engaging in extracurricular activities like sports and sightseeing. They found interactions with Austrian peers enriching and allowed them to enhance their understanding of Austrian culture and establish friendships. Austrian students had a mixed response to the school visit. While some found it enriching to learn about Ukrainian culture and interact with international peers, others noted challenges such as language barriers and limited structured activities. The exchange raised awareness among Austrian students about global issues and cultural diversity but highlighted the need for better organization and support to maximize the program's benefits.

Comparing these findings with existing literature underscores the transformative potential of short-term educational exchanges in promoting intercultural understanding and tolerance. However, it also reveals areas for improvement, such as clearer objectives transmitted to the students, enhanced language support, and more inclusive activities. Future exchange programs could benefit from longer durations, comprehensive planning, and integration into curriculum objectives to deepen learning outcomes for both Ukrainian and Austrian students. This study contributes to the broader discourse on peace education through cultural exchange by demonstrating the practical implications of such initiatives during times of conflict. By fostering mutual understanding and empathy through direct interactions, educational exchanges play a crucial role in promoting peaceful coexistence of humanity.

**Prospects for Further Research.** Looking ahead, this study lays a foundation for future research and methodological advancements in the field of exchange programs, especially in the context of peace education. The insights gained from this research suggest avenues for further exploration and development of educational strategies that support cross-cultural learning in diverse contexts. Employing a more detailed mixed-methods research design that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches can enrich our understanding by capturing both specific experiences and broader trends and impacts on participants' attitudes and perceptions. Future research may also benefit from gaining perspectives from a wider array of stakeholders involved in these exchanges (e.g. teachers, school principals, accompanying persons, program organizers). Understanding their roles, challenges, and perspectives on the outcomes of educational exchanges can provide a comprehensive view of the program's effectiveness and impact. Additionally, exploring the role of educational policies and governmental support in facilitating international educational exchanges during crises presents a compelling field of investigation.

Furthermore, the impact of educational exchanges on peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected regions can be explored in more depth. Research may delve into the potential of how such programs contribute to mutual understanding, respect, and peace. In this context, investigating the potential of virtual exchange programs as alternatives to physical exchanges during conflict or crises becomes pertinent. Analysing the efficacy of virtual platforms in promoting these interactions can reveal innovative ways to maintain the continuity of peace education even amidst logistical challenges, ensuring that more students have the opportunity to engage in mutual exchange and learning.

By pursuing diverse avenues for further research, we aim to deepen our understanding of the transformative potential of educational exchange programs in promoting peace. Enhanced insights from such research can guide the design of effective educational exchange programs, impact governmental and institutional

policies, and encourage a global culture of mutual understanding, and thereby lay the groundwork for a more peaceful world.

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## ВІЗИТ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО УЧНЯ ДО АВСТРІЙСЬКОЇ ШКОЛИ ПІД ЧАС ВІЙНИ: НАСЛІДКИ ДЛЯ МИРОТВОРЧОЇ ОСВІТИ

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*Ця стаття досліджує вплив короткострокових міжнародних освітніх програм обміну в умовах конфлікту. Вона ґрунтується на припущенні, що міжкультурна взаємодія має вирішальне значення для розвитку і культивування взаєморозуміння, поваги, співпраці та миру. Зокрема, рукопис фокусується на конкретному прикладі, коли українські учні відвідали австрійську школу в умовах триваючого конфлікту. Ми розглядаємо програму через призму поглядів як українських, так і австрійських учнів. Методологічно ми збирали емпіричні дані за допомогою анкет, які містили як відкриті, так і закриті запитання. Якісні дані були проаналізовані за допомогою триангуляційного кодування з трьома кодувальниками, виводячи основні та підкатегорії індуктивно. Отримані дані свідчать про значні переваги для українських студентів через культурне занурення та взаємодію з австрійськими однолітками. Незважаючи на такі виклики, як мовний бар'єр, короткостроковий обмін сприяв розширенню поглядів та формуванню міжкультурних компетенцій. Дослідження підкреслює важливість структурованого планування, мовної підтримки та інклюзивних заходів в оптимізації програм освітніх обмінів для сприяння взаєморозумінню в мультикультурному середовищі з метою сприяння більш мирному співіснуванню людства, що є основною метою миротворчої освіти. Насамкінець у статті пропонуються шляхи розвитку майбутніх ініціатив щодо посилення миротворчої освіти через крос-культурне навчання.*

**Ключові слова:** студентський обмін, Україна, Австрія, студентський досвід, миротворча освіта, війна

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