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INTEGRATION WITHOUT MIGRATION: THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN-ORIENTED EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION NARRATIVES IN YOUTH RETENTION IN UKRAINE

Abstract

The article investigates the role of European-oriented education and communication narratives as mechanisms of youth retention in Ukraine under conditions of socio-economic instability, war-related uncertainty, and increasing educational migration. The study is based on the results of a survey conducted among participants of the educational module “European Strategies,” implemented within the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet project “EU Strategies for Competitiveness, Growth and Prosperity” (EUSTRAT) at Alfred Nobel University during 2022–2025.

The research aims to identify key communication triggers influencing educational and migration-related decision-making among young people and to determine how European-oriented educational programs contribute to reducing migration intentions. The methodological framework combines quantitative and

qualitative approaches, including statistical analysis of survey responses and interpretation of open-ended answers.

The findings demonstrate that contemporary education performs functions that extend beyond knowledge transfer and increasingly acts as a mechanism shaping behavioral intentions, trust, identity, and perceptions of future opportunities. The study identifies the most influential communication triggers affecting educational choice, including narratives of the digital future, European integration, and Ukraine's recovery through the implementation of European experience. In particular, the highest level of interest among respondents was related to topics of digital transformation of business and society, EU development strategies, post-war recovery of Ukraine, and European integration processes.

The article argues that European-oriented educational programs contribute to the formation of a model of "integration without migration," under which students gain access to European values, competencies, and educational standards while remaining in Ukraine. The results indicate that universities increasingly function not only as educational institutions but also as communication platforms and social stabilizers that reduce uncertainty, strengthen trust, and create perceptions of future self-realization within the country.

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying its findings to the development of communication strategies for higher education institutions aimed at increasing the attractiveness of education in Ukraine, strengthening youth engagement, and reducing migration intentions. Particular attention is devoted to the role of Erasmus+ Jean Monnet projects in supporting "internationalization at home" and promoting European-oriented educational narratives.

Keywords: youth retention; educational migration; European-oriented education; communication narratives; higher education; digital transformation; Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Module

Problem statement

In the context of prolonged socio-economic instability, large-scale migration processes, and the consequences of the full-scale war, the issue of youth retention in Ukraine has become strategically important for both the national higher education system and the long-term socio-economic development of the country. Educational migration, traditionally associated with globalization and international academic mobility, is increasingly influenced by security concerns, uncertainty about the future, and perceptions of career opportunities and quality of life. Under such conditions, young people's educational choices are closely interconnected with decisions regarding remaining in Ukraine or seeking opportunities abroad.

At the same time, modern universities are gradually transforming from institutions focused exclusively on knowledge transfer into environments that shape behavioral intentions, value orientations, trust, and perceptions of future prospects. In this context, higher education can be considered not only as a factor of human capital development but also as a mechanism of youth retention capable of reducing migration push factors.

Particular importance is attached to European-oriented educational programs that integrate EU-related content, digital transformation topics, and narratives of Ukraine's recovery and future development. Such programs create opportunities for "integration without migration," enabling young people to become involved in the European educational and value space while remaining in Ukraine.

At the same time, the communication dimension of education remains insufficiently explored. Contemporary educational programs increasingly function as platforms for transmitting narratives and meanings that influence young people's perceptions of opportunities, belonging, and self-realization. However,

the role of communication triggers and European-oriented narratives in shaping migration-related educational decisions and youth retention in Ukraine still requires further research.

Purpose of the article

The purpose of the article is to investigate the role of European-oriented education and communication narratives as mechanisms of youth retention in Ukraine, as well as to identify the key communication triggers influencing educational and migration-related decisions among young people.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The issue of educational migration and youth retention has become an increasingly important topic in contemporary academic discourse, particularly in the context of globalization, internationalization of higher education, and intensifying competition for human capital. Classical migration theories explain migration decisions through the interaction of push and pull factors. In particular, Everett S. Lee emphasized that migration intentions are shaped by economic, social, and environmental conditions influencing individual decision-making [1]. In contemporary conditions, education is increasingly considered one of the key determinants of migration behavior among young people.

The human capital approach developed by Gary Becker interprets education as an investment that increases future economic opportunities and professional competitiveness [2]. This perspective has been further expanded in studies on international student mobility, which demonstrate that educational migration is often associated with expectations of better career prospects and social mobility [3].

At the same time, recent studies increasingly emphasize the broader social role of higher education. Simon Marginson argues that universities perform not only economic but also social and stabilizing functions by shaping identity, trust, and perceptions of future opportunities [4]. Similar approaches are reflected in

studies on “internationalization at home,” which suggest that universities can provide access to international and European educational experiences without requiring physical mobility [5].

An important theoretical contribution to understanding behavioral intentions is provided by narrative approaches. Robert J. Shiller introduced the concept of narrative economics, according to which ideas, stories, and communication narratives significantly influence individual expectations and decision-making processes [6]. In the educational context, this means that universities increasingly act as communication platforms transmitting narratives about the future, professional success, and social belonging.

Despite the growing body of research on educational migration and internationalization, the role of European-oriented educational programs and communication narratives as mechanisms of youth retention in Ukraine remains insufficiently explored. In particular, limited attention has been paid to the concept of “integration without migration,” under which education creates opportunities for involvement in the European educational and value space while remaining in the home country.

Presentation of the main material of the study

The empirical basis of the study is formed by the results of a survey conducted among participants of the educational module “European Strategies,” implemented within the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet project “EU Strategies for Competitiveness, Growth and Prosperity” (EUSTRAT) at Alfred Nobel University during 2022–2025. The project was aimed at developing participants’ understanding of European development strategies, digital transformation, European integration processes, and the role of EU experience in Ukraine’s development and recovery. More than 250 participants completed the program, which allows the project to be considered a relevant empirical basis for analyzing the role of education in shaping youth behavioral orientations.

The methodological framework of the research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis made it possible to identify the structure of participants' interests and evaluate changes in awareness after completing the course. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses allowed for the identification of deeper motivational patterns related to educational choices, perceptions of the future, trust in institutions, and migration-related intentions.

The interpretation of the results is based on the human capital theory [2], migration decision and basic push–pull theory [1], and contemporary approaches to educational mobility and the role of universities in fostering social stability [4; 5].

The obtained results demonstrate that contemporary education performs functions that extend far beyond knowledge transfer. In conditions of uncertainty and intensified migration processes, educational programs increasingly shape behavioral intentions, perceptions of opportunities, and future-oriented expectations. In this context, education can be interpreted as a mechanism of youth retention capable of reducing migration push factors and strengthening young people's willingness to build their future in Ukraine.

One of the key findings of the study is the high level of positive perception of the educational experience. In particular, 92,3% of respondents evaluated the course as interesting and useful, while the overwhelming majority positively assessed the teaching methods and the practical relevance of the acquired knowledge. These results indicate not only the effectiveness of the educational process but also the formation of trust in the university as an institution.

Under contemporary conditions, trust becomes one of the key determinants of behavioral intentions [7]. Young people's decisions regarding education and migration are increasingly influenced not only by economic considerations but also by perceptions of institutional reliability, predictability, and future stability. In this regard, universities begin to perform the function of social stabilizers that

provide students with a sense of belonging, support, and confidence in future opportunities.

The findings also demonstrate that the content of educational programs plays a decisive role in shaping educational motivation. The analysis of respondents' interests revealed that the highest level of engagement was generated by topics related to digital transformation and European integration. In particular, 76,9% of respondents identified the topic of digital transformation of business and society as the most interesting. In addition, 69,2% expressed interest in the application of EU experience for Ukraine's recovery, 61,5% were interested in EU development strategies, and 53,8% in Ukraine's integration into the European Union.

These results indicate that young people are strongly oriented toward narratives associated with technological modernization, European development models, and future-oriented transformation processes. The narrative of the digital future is particularly significant because digital competencies are increasingly perceived as a prerequisite for professional competitiveness and long-term employability [8]. In the context of rapid technological change, education associated with digital transformation creates a perception of professional stability and future career opportunities within the country.

At the same time, the narrative of Ukraine's recovery through European experience performs an important emotional and value-based function. It creates a sense of involvement in national transformation processes and strengthens young people's perception that they can contribute to the country's future development. This significantly changes the logic of educational motivation. Education is no longer perceived exclusively as a pathway to migration but increasingly becomes associated with opportunities for self-realization within Ukraine.

The European integration narrative also plays a crucial role. Importantly, the study demonstrates that European-oriented educational content does not

necessarily stimulate migration intentions. On the contrary, respondents perceive European integration primarily as a model of development that can be implemented within Ukraine itself. The desire expressed by respondents to "be part of the European community without losing Ukrainian identity" reflects the emergence of a new model of educational motivation based on combining local and global dimensions. Such an approach is consistent with the concepts of glocalization and transnational identity [9; 10].

This finding allows education to be interpreted through the concept of "integration without migration." In this model, young people gain access to European values, knowledge, and educational standards while remaining in their home country. Such an approach corresponds to contemporary concepts of "internationalization at home," according to which universities create opportunities for international integration without requiring physical mobility.

An important result of the study is the significant increase in respondents' awareness after completing the course. The proportion of participants with a high level of awareness about the EU increased from 30,8% to 61,5%, while the share of respondents with low awareness decreased substantially. Similar trends were identified regarding understanding of digital transformation and European development strategies.

This increase in awareness indicates not only the effectiveness of the educational process but also the broader social role of education in reducing uncertainty. In psychological and behavioral research, this phenomenon is interpreted as a reduction of uncertainty and an increase in self-efficacy, which directly influences strategic life decisions [11]. Contemporary studies confirm that young people's decisions to migrate or remain in their home country are shaped by a complex set of push and pull factors, among which education plays an increasingly important role [12; 13]. In conditions of instability and crisis,

uncertainty about future opportunities becomes one of the strongest migration push factors.

Educational programs that provide students with a clearer understanding of professional opportunities, development strategies, and European integration processes contribute to the formation of a stronger sense of control over the future.

In this context, education functions not merely as a system of knowledge acquisition but as a mechanism for shaping future-oriented expectations. It contributes to the development of self-efficacy, confidence, and long-term planning capacity. Consequently, educational programs become instruments capable of influencing migration-related behavioral intentions.

The analysis of open-ended responses additionally revealed the importance of emotional and value-based dimensions of educational experience. Respondents frequently emphasized the practical relevance of the course, the professionalism of instructors, and the importance of understanding European development processes. At the same time, many participants associated European-oriented education with opportunities for personal development, social belonging, and professional realization in Ukraine.

These findings demonstrate that educational communication increasingly performs a strategic function. Universities no longer compete solely through educational quality in the traditional sense. They also compete through meanings, narratives, and representations of the future. Communication narratives related to digital transformation, European integration, innovation, and Ukraine’s recovery become important instruments influencing how young people perceive their future prospects within the country.

Therefore, universities should be considered not only educational institutions but also communication platforms shaping behavioral intentions and social expectations. Through European-oriented educational content, participation in international projects, and integration into global academic networks,

universities create symbolic bridges between Ukraine and the European educational space.

Particularly important in this context is the role of Erasmus+ Jean Monnet projects. Such initiatives create opportunities for integrating European content into the educational process and contribute to the formation of "internationalization at home." They allow students to feel involved in the European educational and value space without physical migration, thereby reducing the perception that international mobility is the only pathway to professional success and self-realization.

Thus, education begins to perform the function of integration without migration. It enables students to acquire knowledge, skills, and values associated with the European educational space without leaving Ukraine. This fundamentally changes the logic of educational mobility, transforming it from physical movement into symbolic and intellectual integration [14].

The findings of the study make it possible to identify several interconnected mechanisms through which education contributes to youth retention in Ukraine. The cognitive mechanism is associated with increased awareness and understanding of development opportunities. The emotional mechanism is reflected in the formation of trust and a sense of belonging. The value-based mechanism relates to the development of identities combining Ukrainian and European dimensions. Finally, the behavioral mechanism manifests itself in the transformation of migration-related intentions and the strengthening of willingness to pursue education and professional realization within Ukraine.

Thus, European-oriented educational programs create a multidimensional retention effect that combines rational, emotional, and value-based components. It is precisely this complexity that determines their effectiveness in shaping educational choices and reducing migration intentions among young people.

Conclusions

The study confirms that European-oriented education can function as an effective mechanism of youth retention in Ukraine under conditions of socio-economic instability, war-related uncertainty, and increasing educational migration. The findings demonstrate that educational choices are significantly influenced not only by the quality of educational services but also by communication narratives shaping perceptions of the future, opportunities for self-realization, and social belonging.

The most influential communication triggers identified in the study are narratives related to the digital future, European integration, and Ukraine's recovery. Their interaction forms a multidimensional motivational framework combining rational, emotional, and value-based components. This creates conditions under which education is perceived not as a pathway to migration, but as a mechanism of "integration without migration."

The research also demonstrates that universities increasingly perform the role of communication platforms and social stabilizers that shape trust, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen young people's confidence in future opportunities within Ukraine. In this context, Erasmus+ Jean Monnet projects play an important role by integrating European content into the educational environment and supporting the development of "internationalization at home."

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of applying its findings to the development of communication strategies for higher education institutions aimed at strengthening youth engagement and reducing migration intentions in Ukraine.

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