



Social work perspective on distance learning in refugee education among Ukrainian child learners in Hungary

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Abstract

The right to education was established in 1948 by the United Nations, yet millions of children are still deprived of it today. This is particularly the case for refugees. The lack of sufficient education for refugee children damages their futures and harms society by compounding the impacts of displacement onto later generations. This paper aims to examine how distance learning can reduce this damage, focusing on Ukrainian refugees in Hungary. This study's theoretical framework is based on a learning theory of the digital age, connectivism. It relies on qualitative materials collected from Hungarian social workers who are in contact with Ukrainian distance learners. The findings reveal that refugee students relying exclusively on the Ukrainian distance education system do not fulfill educational requirements in Hungary, yet the Hungarian national educational system is unprepared to meet their needs. This creates a legal and social tension, in which social workers must manoeuvre in an imperfect system while prioritizing the wellbeing of the children. The study intends to contribute to the existing literature on refugee education in times of continuous technological development.

Keywords: Refugee Education, Ukrainian Refugees, Distance Learning, Child Education, Connectivism

Word count: 178

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Table of Abbreviations

AOS All Ukrainian Online School

ICT Information and communication technology

INEE Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

ISCED International Standard Classification of Education

MOES Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

Knowledge plays an essential role in advancing communities (Szymkowiak et al.,2021). Vaill (1996) highlights that “learning must be a way of being – an ongoing set of attitudes and actions by individuals and groups, that they employ to try to keep abreast of the surprising, novel, messy, obtrusive, recurring events...” (Vaill, 1996:42). International Standard Classification of Education defines education, as “processes by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies, and behaviours across generations” (UNESCO 2012:79). As the Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, education should aim for the full development of the human personality (UDHR, 1948). Education is fundamental and empowering. It should promote respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms. As an enabling human right, it opens doors to other rights and ensures opportunities to fully participate in the society (UNHCR, 2023a). Education is essential to building a learning society, it has been acknowledged as a tool to eliminate racial and religious intolerance, genocide, xenophobia, fear, and other kinds of harm against humanity (UNHCR, 2023b).

Globally, the number of people affected by forced displacement is continuously growing (UNHCR, 2023b). Their displacement affects these groups’ access to education, and thus the way these groups advance economically and socially. One of the most critical problems refugee children face is the lack of educational opportunities. This creates the risk of a ‘lost generation ’ (Taftaf & Williams, 2020:1). In other words, a generation of children whose lack of education holds their community back over their lifetime, echoing across generations. In 2023, more than seven million children were out of school, therefore denied the right to education and at risk of being “lost”. (UNHCR, 2023b). The school-age refuge population grew to 14.8 million by the end of 2022 globally (ibid). On its own, the invasion of Ukraine disrupted more than five million Ukrainian children’s education (UN News, 2023). Additionally, children who are out of school are often “invisible”, making them hard to identify and count, meaning the out of school rates are potentially higher than indicated in the statistics (UNESCO, 2023). This invisibility emphasizes the urgent need for a flexible and rapid way to bring quality and accessible education to refugee children (Wagner, 2017).

Digital connectivity and access to digital tools is essential to refugees (UNHCR, 2018). The presence of digital technologies in education has increased the general expectation that education is more accessible and more effective (Selwyn, 2012). Wagner (2017) pointed out that technological innovation is important to enrich learning opportunities for refugee communities as well. Digital technologies have made educational places and spaces more fluid and fragmented (Selwyn, 2012). As Selwyn (2012) claims, the educational use of digital technologies is a social affair between structure and agency. In other words, a students' access to digital technologies in education is a product of the structures providing it, and the students' agency or lack thereof in relation to these structures. Their access is strongly affected by dynamics of discrimination, power, and inequality within the providing structures. Rarely do these students have much agency. Wagner (2017) emphasizes that partnerships between actors, such as INGOs, governments, advocacy groups, is crucial to reap the benefits of digital technology in refugee education.

Refugee education has changed significantly over the past two centuries (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). From community organized refugee education, through refugees' integration into national educational systems, to modern non-formal approaches, refugee education appears in many forms (ibid). The variety of refugee education provision is noticeable looking at Ukrainian children's situation residing in Hungary as well (Ercse, 2023).

Since February 2022, millions of Ukrainians had to leave their country to seek safety in foreign countries (UNHCR, 2024a). Globally 6,554,800 refugees from Ukraine are recorded (ibid). Hungary is a part of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP), a country of transit and country of destination for Ukrainian refugees. As of 14th of June 2024, Hungary recorded 4,907,240 border crossing since 24 February 2020 (ibid). 43,230 refugees from Ukraine have applied for asylum, temporary protection, or other types of national protection in Hungary (ibid).

Ukrainian refugees in Hungary have what the government has called a "Temporary Protection Status", as opposed to an internationally recognized refugee status. Temporary protection is granted to group of individuals arriving to Hungary in mass on account of "being forced to flee their country due to an armed conflict, civil war, ethnic conflict or the general, systematic and gross violation of human rights, in particular torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" (Office of Immigration and Nationality, n.d.). The main difference between temporary protection status and refugee status is its duration. Temporary protection is granted for one year

but may be subject to extension. Whereas refugee status lasts until the refugee receives Hungarian citizenship, or until the status is revoked (ibid) I would like to state that even though I understand the legal categorization and that Ukrainians are not officially recognized as “refugees” in Hungary, in this study I continue to use the term “refugee” to refer Ukrainian’s under the temporary protection status.

Regardless of a whatever legal status held by a Ukrainian refugee, access to education in the Hungarian national system is granted (106/2022. (III. 12.) Korm. Rend.). At the same time, the Ukrainian government allows their citizen to continue their studies remotely under the Ukrainian curriculum (Pytiur, 2022). Additionally, 36 non-governmental, civil, and refugee-led organisations across Hungary provide educational support to refugee children (UNHCR, 2024c). Concerns regarding the education offered by the Hungarian government were raised from the beginning of the refugee response (Hungary Today, 2022). At the same time, the efficacy of distance education for refugees have been questioned in the previous years (Bhatnagar, 2024; Cloete, 2017; Cowden et al, 2020; Daniel, 2010).

Legal assistance and protection are crucial for refugees ’well-being in the asylum system, just as responding to their social needs is necessary (Kováts et al., 2006). The sooner the social needs of refugees are met, the probability of social and emotional complications in the following stages of the refugee experience is reduced (ibid). The aim of social work is to respond to these social and emotional needs and help people to cope with the problems in their lives (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Social work aims to enhance people’s wellbeing and to avoid their social isolation and marginalisation (Kováts et al., 2006).

When it comes to responding to education as a social need, social workers provide a variety of services, such as individual and family counselling emphasizing the importance of education (Kováts et al., 2006). They offer information and guidance to understand the educational system in the host country. They may assist caretakers in the process of enrolment and provide counselling to the children where they can share their experience (ibid). On a community level, social work intervention may provide educational support, such as non-formal classes for children. Moreover, organized support groups for parents and educational professionals work to raise awareness of the risks and challenges faced by refugee children. These groups liaise with school professionals and educational authorities, advocating for large-scale improvement to refugee education (ibid).

To examine the role of distance learning among Ukrainian refugees in Hungary, this study is approached from social workers perspective. The multifaceted nature of social work and my own social worker background positively encouraged me to examine the topic through the lenses of fellow social workers. From the beginning of the Ukrainian war in February 2022, I have been working with Ukrainian refugees as a social worker in Budapest, Hungary. My interest in researching refugee education was influenced by my growing concern regarding the quality and accessibility of education provided for Ukrainian refugees. I believe that education is the most powerful tool for improving human well-being, our environment and our economy. Throughout my personal experience supporting refugees access to basic social needs, I met several Ukrainian children who missed out on school for weeks, months and in some case, years. These experiences raised my awareness of the complexity of the issue and made me question how social workers could offer more effective help to ensure the right for education.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The importance of refugee education has been heavily studied (Bishop, 2023; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Previous studies identified the challenges of distance education, and others emphasized its flexibility and accessibility (Taftaf & Williams, 2020; Wagner, 2017). There are studies focused on distance education specifically provisioned for refugees (Nazli & Culha, 2023). This paper examines the educational situation of Ukrainian refugee children residing in Hungary on primary and secondary educational level, focusing on distance learning.

The main ambition of this study is to shed light on the challenges and benefits of distance learning in the context of the Ukrainian refugees. With a theoretical analysis, the goal is to uncover the role of distance education in these children's lives. The study frames its analysis from a social worker's perspective, as they are in regular contact with them and are tasked with responding to their social needs. This study is an inductive study relying on qualitative material. The theoretical framework adopted for this purpose is connectivism. Purposive sampling was applied for data selection. The paper intends to contribute to the existing literature on refugee education.

The central questions guiding the research are:

1. What is the role of distance learning for Ukrainian child refugees in Hungary?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities of distance learning for this group?
3. How do social workers in Hungary navigate these challenges and opportunities?

1.3 Delimitations

Owing to time and resource constraints, this study faces some potential limitation. These limitations may impact the generalizability of the study.

The first limitation to consider is the sample size. To limit the scope of the paper, the research relies on material collected only from social workers instead of a broader approach involving other professionals, teachers, legal advisers, or the affected refugee community. Moreover, the study only deals with Ukrainian refugee children residing in Hungary, instead of looking at other refugee communities. Additionally, the study examines perspectives on distance learning on primary and secondary educational level. It does not cover distance learning used in other levels of education, such as early childhood educations, post-secondary education and beyond. Due to the delimitations of purposive sampling, the study offers a contextual in-depth insight, rather than a broadly applicable explanation.

There are translation limitations to consider. I offered the interviewees the choice of what language we would use to conduct the interviews in orders to get the most out of each subject. As such, in the end, all interviews were conducted in Hungarian. Despite my efforts to translate the text as precisely as possible, there may still be errors.

Lastly, there are varying and competing perspectives on the role and efficacy of distance learning in refugee education, due to the varied nature of the refugee experience and the many forms of distance learning.

Regardless the limitations of the study, it aims to offers an in-depth focused examination and hopefully provide valuable insight contributing to a deeper understanding of refugee education, the Ukrainian experience in Hungary, and the role of social workers.

1.4. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, presented the research problem, the aim of the study and its delimitations. Chapter 2, provides a literature review, summarizing relevant research and literature in the areas of refugee education, distance learning, and the Ukrainian and Hungarian educational systems. Chapter 3 is devoted to introducing the theoretical framework and discusses connectivism as a learning theory. Chapter 4 introduces the method and the materials. Chapter 5 presents the analysis. Finally, Chapter 6 provides the conclusion of the study and future research recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three sections. Section 2.1 reviews previous research and literature regarding refugee education. Section 2.2 introduces technology's role in education by focusing on distance learning. Finally, Section 2.3 presents the Ukrainian and Hungarian educational curriculum; in doing so, it provides a contextual background for current educational opportunities to Ukrainian refugee children residing in Hungary.

2.1 Refugee education

2.1.1 Challenges refugee children face in access to quality education

Refugee children face obstacles both in accessing education and obtaining quality education (UNHCR, 2019). There are countless barriers hampering their access to education, and there is a high chance for refugee learners to spend an entire school cycle in exile (ibid). Barriers include families lacking identity documentation and educational certificates. Cross-border recognition of these documents can also cause delayed enrolment and low participation rates among refugees (ibid). Cultural, social and religious practices can also be obstacles, for example early marriage, domestic labour, and child labour may keep eligible refugee children away from education. These practices might offer short term benefits, but they deprive learners from the long-term benefits of education (ibid). As is noted in UNESCO's Education 2030 agenda, the biggest proportion of the world's 'out of school population live within conflict-

affected areas (UNESCO, 2015). Environments affected by crisis, violence, and natural disaster harm the access to education even more significantly (ibid). Overcrowded schools, lack of teachers and teaching devices are additional obstacles weakening the quality of education (UNHCR, 2019). On top of the already mentioned obstacles, distance difficulties and discontinuity are factors hindering the attendance of refugee learners (ibid). Even when educational goals are reached, setbacks like the destruction and closing schools are not unusual (UNESCO, 2017).

When refugees gain access to education, the treatment they experience has a significant impact on their educational performance (UNESCO, 2017). Additionally, refugee students are often victims of discrimination and marginalisation, which further harms the quality of their education (Kováts et al., 2006). Gender, religious, cultural, and racial differences should be considered as well. Language barriers are another important obstacle to consider, as language skills are pivotal in determining access to education and ensuing achievements (ibid). To put it simply, in the words of Dryden-Peterson (2022), refugee children “are less likely to go to school. They are less likely to finish school. They are less likely to learn. And they are less likely to feel like they can contribute to their communities” (Sarah Dryden-Peterson, 2022).

2.1.2 Importance of refugee education as a path for opportunities

Education is crucial to fostering peaceful, inclusive societies, it ensures stability, sustainability, justice and diversity (UNESCO, 2023). For forcibly displaced persons, the importance of education is even more substantial (UNHCR, 2023b). For refugees, access to quality education also means protection and psychological support (UNESCO, 2015).

Displaced children are in danger of a wide range of violence and exploitation, including physical, emotional, or sexual dangers. They are at risk of family separation, neglect, exclusion, discrimination, trafficking, or even detention (UNHCR, 2023c). Ives (2007) claims that effective integration of refugees requires active participation in education (Ives, 2017). Their early access to the mainstream school system facilitates their integration into the host society and helps to overcome their trauma caused by their flight (Kováts et al., 2006). Education is a primary method through which a marginalised person can elevate their potential outcomes, by breaking the cycle of dependency (UNESCO, 2017). It empowers individuals, raises their

resilience, and helps them reclaim control over their own lives. When they lack access to primary, secondary, and upper education, refugee children face the risk of falling into exploitation and dependence (UNHCR. 2023b).

The importance of education for developing human potential cannot be overstated. Ercse (2023) emphasizes three dimensions that need to be fulfilled to reach the educational integration of refugees: learning, social and emotional needs (Ercse, 2023).

Table 1. Educational integration needs of refugees

Learning needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Compensating for the lost time outside of school - Adapting to a new educational system - Learning and understanding the language of education
Social needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing a sense of belonging - Building a sense of personal identity - Integrating with non-refugee students - Enhancing communication with others
Emotional needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a feeling of safety - Handling loss, grief, separation, and trauma - Reinstating self-control and self-awareness skills

Source 1 (Ercse,2023:15)

As Dryden-Peterson (2016) claims, education gives refugees the possibility of growing into their full potential, making them more likely to contribute to their host countries or their country of origin. Therefore, the central question to the field of refugee education is how to ensure the right to education, and how to promote refugees' ability to benefit from it (Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

2.1.3 International framework on the right to education

Education is protected under international human rights law, international humanitarian law, international refugee law and under international criminal law (UNESCO, 2017). Regardless

of the presence of international conventions, the fulfilment of refugees' right to education varies around the world (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Education has been universally recognized as an important tool for development (UNESCO, 2015). Its importance and basic requirements have been defined by global goals, frameworks, and handbooks.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as a basis for international and regional instruments underpinning the right to education for all people. The Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 2017) outlines specific rights for refugees' access to education. Education is also protected under the Geneva Conventions and its additional protocols (ibid).

States that have ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNESCO, 2017) are obligated to provide and protect refugees' rights to education. These conventions ensure that at least the minimum requirements of the right to education are upheld by signatory states. Moreover, the conventions reaffirm that refugees must have the same treatment as nationals of the host country (ibid).

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development calls for action to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." (UNESCO, 2015:20). The Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 was adopted to ensure the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The declarations overarching goal is to ensure free, publicly funded quality education for at least 12 years, without discrimination. The agenda supports education policies that recognise the needs of the most vulnerable. It highlights the importance of technology and innovation. The framework offers guidance for implementing inclusive and equitable education, although it emphasises that the implementation of the agenda primarily relies on governments (UNESCO, 2015).

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) provides a handbook that covers the minimum standards for education. INEE defines education in emergencies as a situation in which, whether caused by man-made or natural disasters, the right of education is disrupted (INEE, 2024). They highlight that education should be provisioned and protected by introducing relevant and adaptable standards, supporting education stakeholders globally (ibid)

2.1.4 The gap between implementation and policies

Since 1951 and the defining of the rights of refugees, refugee education has grown to be a vital strategy in encouraging the long-term inclusion of displaced peoples. This strategy, however, currently faces a funding crisis. UNHCR received only 49% of the funding required for educational initiatives in 2022 (UNHCR, 2023b). In some countries, the hindrance and blocking of financial support for refugee education are linked to the negative perception of the arriving people (UNESCO, 2017). This xenophobia and discrimination not only affect education within schools, but across all refugee projects (ibid).

As Dryden-Peterson (2016) demonstrates, there is a significant gap between policy level education directives and real-life implementations. As she points out the “tension between global rights and local implementation is both the genesis and on-going preoccupation of global institutions, including in education” (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). According to the latest report on refugee education by UNHCR (2023b) slow progress has been made. Although, there still is much to do to create a completely inclusive educational system where refugees have the same access to education as host-country nationals (UNHCR, 2023b).

The elimination of obstacles that hinge on nationality, legal status, and documentation is needed. Access to registered schools, with defined curriculum, and well-trained teachers is needed, alongside effective and thorough policies that ensure the access to quality education for refugees (ibid).

Policies and programs related to refugee education hinge on data and process tracing (UNESCO, 2023). Reliable information on the quality, access and outcomes of refugee education is often insufficient. Currently, refugee students are largely invisible in many national and international statistics (ibid). This invisibility creates gaps in statistics, it gives a false account of refugee students in the national system and perpetuates inequalities. Without a reliable picture of the situation, it is unlikely to create fully effective educational systems (ibid).

After giving an overview of the international frameworks that define and underpin the rights refugees have to education and discussing the challenges in the implementation and funding of

refugee education, the next section presents a glossary of relevant educational terminology and a brief overview of technological improvements in education.

2.2 Distance refugee education

As Selwyn (2012) emphasized, technology in education appears in many different forms. Just as education comes in various forms (UNESCO, 2011). Definitions and terms relating to technology, education and distance learning are often used interchangeably, although the definitions are distinct. The main terms relating the topic of this research are presented below, continuing with the discussion of the role of technology in education and delving into distance learning in the refugee context.

2.2.1 Terminology

Formal education is institutionalised, intentional and planned by public organizations. Formal education institutions, be they private, public, or religious, are recognized by the state, and together form the formal education system (UNESCO, 2011:11).

Nonformal education is an additional, alternative and complementary form of education to formal education. Non-formal education is part of lifelong learning. Very often it does not lead to a qualification like formal or equivalent to formal education does (UNESCO, 2011:81).

Informal learning is a way of learning that is intentional, deliberate but not institutionalised. It can occur in the family, workplace, and within a local community in daily life. It can appear on a self, family, or socially directed basis (UNESCO, 2011:12).

Primary education (ISCED level 1) focuses on learning at a basic level of complexity, with little, or no specialisation. Typical entrance age is 6 and the duration usually lasts 6 years. Upon completion of primary education programmes, children may continue their education at lower secondary education (UNESCO, 2011).

Lower secondary education (ISCED level 2) is typically designed to lay the foundation for lifelong learning, and for possible further educational opportunities. Many education systems with compulsory education legislation, end by completing lower secondary education (ibid).

Upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) in most cases is designed as a preparation for tertiary education and/or to provide skills relevant to employment (ibid).

ICT stands for “*Information and communication technology*”. It refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunication. ICTs on its own does not educate, although educational frameworks (like distance education) can be built on ICT tools (Taftaf & Williams, 2020).

Distance Education is an “institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors” (Ozan, 2012:1).

Blended learning is a mixture of offline and online learning. It encompasses several educational environments such as school, online space, home of student and teacher (Pytiur, 2022).

Microlearning is a teaching approach that focuses on acquiring new knowledge in small units (Gillis, 2023).

Remote education is when the learning method provides opportunity for student and teachers to stay in connection through technology. It connects teachers and learners online, outside of the classic classroom learning environments (Daniela & Visvizi, 2021). Remote learning is typically used when regular education is disrupted by an emergency (Ray, 2021). Remote learning comes in various forms around the world, and these forms are often used interchangeably with other technology enhanced learning methods such as online learning, mobile learning, or electronic learning (Wardrip, 2021).

As millions of Ukrainian student’s educations was disrupted by emergency, I contemplated using remote education as the main term leading this study (Osvitoria, 2022). However, due to the mixed use of terms and the limited academic research on remote education in refugee education context, I decided to stick with the broader definition ‘distance education’. I would like to clarify that in this paper I consider distance education as a non-classroom based, formal education method that is built on ICT tools.

2.2.2 Technology's role in education

Technological development changed the way we access and form knowledge, and it plays a huge role in changing our attitude towards learning (Szymkowiak et al., 2021; Wagner, 2017). The confluence of technology and education is a messy, complex, and contradictory issue. (Selwyn, 2016). It is shaped by a wide range of actors, interests, and government concerns in relation to international and cultural issues (Selwyn, 2012). The questions around technologies' role in education have been extensively studied in the past decades. Some deal with questions relating to the politicisation of educational technology (Selwyn, 2012). Other scholars focus on technologies' impact on education (Hawkridge, 1983; Cloete, 2017; Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). Digital technology has been marked as a leading factor to societal development, as it is assumed to cause societal reorganisation by transforming education and learning (Selwyn, 2012). Almost every country has built policies around digital technologies to support the development of education worldwide (ibid).

According to several scholars, the development of ICT is potentially able to facilitate quality and accessibility of education for vulnerable groups as well (Taftaf & Williams, 2020; Wagner, 2017). Technological development affects how information is managed stored, distributed and exchanged (ibid). Although studies have shown that ICT-led education has a chance to eliminate obstacles in providing education, on its own it is incapable of improving learning objectives (Joynes & James, 2018). Therefore, to benefit from the use of technology in refugee education, professional and expert support is crucial (Wagner, 2017). Regarding how technology affects refugee learning outcomes, Wagner (2017) emphasizes that it is hard to see clear evidence either way (ibid).

Oftentimes, traditional classroom-based education is available for refugee children (Taftaf & Williams, 2020). Integration into the host countries national education system is a global recommendation (UN General Assembly, 2018). On the other hand, in some cases, technology-led alternative options exist, and these options are growing in popularity over integrating kids directly into the host country's national system, like the case of Ukrainians in Hungary exemplifies. Chapter 2.2.3 is devoted to introducing the basic elements of distance education in refugee education.

2.2.3 Basic elements of distance education in refugee education

A large percentage of refugee children are at great disadvantage regarding education in general (UNHCR, 2019). Distance education has its own benefits and pitfalls among refugee learners as well (Nazli & Culha, 2023). Below, the opportunities will be discussed and the challenges of distance refugee education introduced in the context of primary and secondary education. The majority of the reviewed literature deals with distance learning during COVID-19 (Nazli & Culha, 2023; Desjardins, 2021; Samsari et al. 2024).

Distance education as a mode of response to refugees' educational crisis is practised both among refugees residing in camps, and in urban areas (Taftaf & Williams, 2020). Distance education might be beneficial when classroom-based education is dangerous or not available at all (ibid). Distance education can bring solutions when schools in the host country are overcrowded and lack educational support, when children experience violence on the way to or/and at schools, when children are experiencing abandonment trauma, work-related obstacles, or when they face basic physical constraints. Participating in distance learning can be beneficial to special needs children as well. Distance learning is often practised when families are hoping to return their country of origin in a short period of time (ibid). Through distance education, learning can be carried on anywhere at any time. Flexibility, availability and rapid delivery of learning materials are potential benefits of distance education (ibid).

As Sherman et al. (2022) concludes, the main aspects of distance learning are "1) the possibility of learning regardless of geographic location; 2) determining the pace of learning; and 3) the ability to set one's own curriculum" (Sherman et al ,2022:18). There are wireless (mobile learning) and internet connection based (electronic learning) types of distance learning methods. Mobile learning is considered more beneficial among refugees, as it does not require internet connection (Taftaf & Williams, 2020). The support of distance learning in refugee education is different among countries (Nazli & Culha, 2023). As Samsari et al. (2024) claimed the quality of distance education relies more on where refugee children reside, than their educational necessities.

Problems refugee children might be confronted with during distance learning is a lack of educational technologies, language challenges, a low-level of online participation, a low level of academic achievements, absence of parental support, lack of motivation and internet connection problems (Nazli & Culha, 2023). Internet connection reliability is mainly a

challenge for camp refugees, although it may hinder urban refugees learning methods as well (Taftaf & Williams, 2020). Emotional, psychological and behavioural states might be negatively affected by distance education (Nazli & Culha, 2023). On top of the above problems, literacy, numeracy and computer literacy are additional constraints (Desjardins, 2021). Lack of technological support for learners and their families have been marked as an important deficiency (ibid).

Education cannot be put on hold and postponed to better times, as education itself creates those "better times" (Osvitoria, 2022:1). As distance education allows refugees to continue education where it was left off, Ukrainian children are allowed to continue their studies through a distance and blended educational program called the All Ukrainian School (Taftaf & Williams, 2020; Osvitoria, 2022). In the following, the literature review introduces the Ukrainian curriculum, the All Ukrainian School (AOS), and other learning opportunities for Ukrainian refugees residing in Hungary.

2.3. Educational opportunities for Ukrainian refugees in Hungary

Section 2.3 briefly compares the Ukrainian and Hungarian compulsory educational systems. Then it elaborates on Ukrainian distance education and introduces the alternative educational opportunities in Hungary for the affected group.

2.3.1 Comparison of the Ukrainian and the Hungarian educational systems

Compulsory education in the Ukrainian educational system usually starts at age six (plus or minus a year) and ends at the age of 15 (MOES, 2024). There are three levels of education as Table 4 shows. For Ukrainian children, education lasts for 11 to 12 years. For children who started primary education after the educational reform in 2018, it lasts 12 years. After completing the compulsory levels, students are required to pass the state's final exam. Upon successful completion they are granted a certificate validating that educational level (ibid).

The educational teaching material used in the classroom needs to be accepted by the Ukrainian government (MOES, 2024). Separate teaching materials are dedicated to different educational levels. To provide quality education, every educational institution is required to create its own educational program and curricula (ibid). The educational program and curricula can be

independent or based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MOES) (ibid).

In the Hungarian system, compulsory education generally starts at age six, but can be started one year later upon parental request (2011. évi CXC. Törvény). The exit age for compulsory education is 16. Just as in the Ukrainian system, education is separated into different levels as Table 3 shows. For Hungarian children, secondary education ends with grade 12 (ibid). If they participated in an additional year devoted to learning foreign languages, education ends after completing grade 13. Student passing the national exam after grades 12 or 13 receive a certificate that opens the door to higher education (ibid).

In the Ukrainian system, curricula can be independently created and adapted by the educational institutions themselves (MOES, 2024). In Hungary, there is a mandatory national framework (2011. évi CXC. Törvény). Institutions are allowed to deviate from this framework only by about thirty percent (ibid).

The levels of primary and secondary education in the two countries are detailed in the following tables.

Table 2 Levels of education in Ukraine

Levels of education	Educational grades	Length of education in years
Primary education	1-4	4
Basic secondary education	5-9	5
Specialized secondary education	10-11,12 (until grade 12 since 2018)	2, 3 (3 since 2018)

Source 2 (MOES,2024.06.30)

Table 3 Levels of education in Hungary

Levels of education	Educational grades	Length of education in years
Primary education	1-4	4
Lower secondary education	5-8	4
Upper secondary education	9-12, or 9-13	4 or 5

Source 3 (2011. évi CXCV. Törvény, 2024.06.30)

2.3.2 Ukrainian distance education in emergency

Distance education in Ukraine was first launched to address the educational obstacles created by the COVID-19 pandemic. This service proved doubly useful, as the program was continued to provide education to displaced students since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion (Osvitoria, 2022). The first national platform for distance and blended learning was created by Osvitoria, an NGO in collaboration with the Ukrainian government and UNICEF (Osvitoria, 2022). Their platform provides access to education for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children within Ukraine as well as those in exile (ibid). This technology-led system adapts the traditional curricula to the ‘the new realities of life’ for many Ukrainian families (Pytiur, 2022:7).

Osvitoria provides two platforms separated by ISCED levels: for students in grades 1 through 4 (ISCED 1), the "Can't-Wait to Learn" mobile application provides access to teaching materials. For grades 5 to 11 (ISCED 2 and 3), the "All-Ukrainian Online School" (AOS) is the platform used for distance and blended learning (Osvitoria, 2022).

Table 4 Ukrainian distance and blended learning programs

Name of the program	Targeted grades	Format of the program
Can't Wait to Learn	1-4	Mobile application
All-Ukrainian Online School (AOS)	5-11	Online platform and mobile application

Source 4 (Osvitoria Annual Report, 2022)

Each application corresponds with the equivalent national states' educational program and meets the state's requirements (Osvitoria, 2022). The materials are proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and tested by The Ukrainian Institute for Educational Development. Through these efforts, children are empowered to continue their educational journey remotely, either with their school or self-led (MOES, 2024).

The "Can't Wait to Learn" application implements a "microlearning" method of an NGO called War Child Holland, and it was created with the participation of children. It provides education mainly through game content. (Osvitoria, 2022).

On the All-Ukrainian Online School platform, after a quick registration, a student gains access to all video lessons, tests, and materials in 18 different subjects (Pytiur, 2022). Teachers can invite their student to participate in courses and create classes built on the so-called 'inverted classroom' technique coined by Kathleen Ducker (Pytiur, 2022:9). Inverted classroom, also known as a "flipped classroom," is a teaching method frequently used in distance learning in which students first learn about the subject on their own, then discuss it at class (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

On the AOS platform, courses are divided into topics, topics into lessons. Each lesson in the course contains a video, lesson notes, and a test. After working through their lessons by watching videos and reading notes, students are asked 5 questions, testing their learning. The platform allows teachers and students to check learning progress, adjust grades, and repeat questions and lessons before the final tasks. However, certificates for completing a course were not yet available as of July 2024 (Pytiur, 2022).

These two main educational platforms are supplemented with additional gamified materials to support a successful learning process (Osvitoria, 2022). Tutorials, instructions, lesson plans and schedules are available online to facilitate users, teachers, parents and other professionals (Pytiur, 2022). Relying on data from Osvitoria's latest educational report, 765,000 children accessed education in year 2023 through these platforms (Osvitoria, 2023).

The Ukrainian distance education program's main objective is to continue students' education while avoiding the accumulation of children in dangerous areas (Sherman et al, 2022). To accomplish this, it has developed unique training methods and an innovative digital platform.

These initiatives have significantly benefited from the experience gained during COVID-19 pandemic. Using a broad set of tools, applications, and materials has proven very effective (ibid).

As much as these platforms have made an impact, the context is still not ideal. As Sherman (2022) has noted, there are still several challenges faced by the All-Ukrainian Online School platform, namely students' internet connection constraints, the lack of control over learning performance (given the context, this is hard to address), and teachers' refusal to adapt themselves to the new platforms in order to improve their teaching skills on online platforms (Sherman et al, 2022).

In the following section, alternative learning opportunities for Ukrainian refugees in Hungary will be discussed.

2.3.3 Learning opportunities in Hungary

As a result of the Russian invasion, large numbers of people left their home to seek safety in Hungary, including Ukrainian citizens, Ukrainian and Hungarian dual citizens and third country national (UNHCR, 2024c). Refugee children are a heterogeneous group. Their mother tongue, social and residential status and educational backgrounds vary drastically, therefore their educational needs can differ drastically as well (Ercse, 2023).

In Hungary, Ukrainian refugees are granted a “temporary protection status” upon request. This status is not the same as the status of a refugee (106/2022. (III. 12.) Korm. Rendelet). In regards to education, “temporary protection status” holders are legally granted the same educational services as Hungarian nationals (ibid). As a holder of a “temporary protection status”, children are legally obligated to enrol in the Hungarian national educational system (Ercse, 2023). Although in many cases, Ukrainians refugees do not participate in the Hungarian formal education system. They prefer following the Ukrainian distance education, which is not recognized by the Hungarian state as formal education. Therefore, in the eyes of the Hungarian state, the children who exclusively follow the Ukrainian distance education are considered out of school (ibid).

Officials in the Hungarian national education system maintain that integrating Ukrainian refugees into the national system is the only sufficient solution (Ercse, 2023:41). Ercse (2023) claims that Ukrainian refugee's education cannot be solved by just making their integration into the national system compulsory. Several countries welcoming Ukrainian refugees formed cooperations with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science to better respond to the refugees' educational needs. Hungary decided not to cooperate in this way (Ercse, 2023).

Hungarian law allows for the creation of temporary educational institutions. This provision is often taken advantage of by those with temporary residency permits to continue teaching their children under other educational systems. These temporary institutions are authorized as long as they do not contradict the Hungarian constitution (2007. évi LXXXIX. Törvény 5. §; 15/A. §). They do not need to align with Hungarian state requirements. Consequently, certificates issued by these institutions may not be recognized by the Hungarian government (2011. évi CXC. Törvény).

In Hungary, a wide range of non-formal educational services is provided for Ukrainian children by around 30 different NGOs, INGOs, and private companies, to support their educational journey (UNHCR, 2024c). These services encompass non-formal language classes for children, catch up classes and learning support and recreational educational services (UNHCR, 2024b). Besides non-formal learning activities, these services also include assistance in enrollment in and summer camp activities, and are frequently indicated as an available service for the affected group (ibid).

The education system in Hungary is already in poor condition, burdened by state regulation, and dealing with a severe lack of teaching professionals (Ercse, 2023). The system does not encourage multiculturalism or inclusivity, and has a high level of socio-cultural discrimination and selectivity (ibid). It lacks the capacity to assess the needs of its staff, and let alone learning groups like Ukrainian refugees; in these ways, and others, the system is not able to adapt. It is wholly unprepared for the needs of refugee populations, especially non-Hungarian speakers' (ibid). Access to information is slight and hard to find. In Ercse's words "There is no sign of conscious, needs-based reflective planning with the necessary funding assigned to the task" of meeting the needs of Ukrainian refugee learners (Ercse, 2023:87).

Considering these conditions, Ercse's findings show that caretakers and parents of Ukrainian refugee children prefer Ukrainian distance and blended learning platform over integrating them into the Hungarian national system (Ercse, 2023).

The above literature review summarized previous research to offer contextual background. It highlighted the literature gap that this study aims to cover. In the following chapter the theoretical and contextual framework will be introduced.

3. Theoretical framework

As discussed in the literature review, the way we learn has been deeply influenced and altered by technology. The exponential development of information communication technology has significantly transformed formal, non-formal and informal educational landscapes (Osvitoria, 2023; Cloete, 2017; Wagner, 2017). This technological development has introduced a number of innovations to education. One outcome of this innovation has been the growth of distance learning (Hendricks, 2019). Technology has helped distance education overcome its historic obstacles, and provided new, compelling ways to engage with educational content, creating a global, digital learning community (ibid).

To understand the perspectives of technology-led distance education among Ukrainian refugee learners, this study uses the theoretical framework of connectivism. Connectivism was developed by Siemens in 2005. He claims that theorization of learning activities require a learner centered multi-theoretical approach, as technology continuously impacts the way we acquire knowledge (Siemens, 2005b).

3.1 Altering learning theories

As information technology has become faster, and research alongside it, the lifetime of knowledge in many fields has shrunk. Lifelong learning has thus become a necessity. This learning is itself often enhanced by technology (Gonzalez, 2004; Siemens, 2005a), creating a flywheel of faster research, knowledge-creation, and learning. Gonzales (2004) demonstrates how the time from when knowledge is created until it is outdated is much shorter than it was decades ago (Gonzalez, 2004). This shortened lifespan of knowledge affects how we learn,

from where we gain information, and how we manage that acquired knowledge (Siemens, 2005a).

Siemens (2005a) claims that a major challenge to any learning theory is to apply the knowledge we already have. He emphasizes that theoretical constructs around learning should be “reflective of underlying social environments” (Siemens, 2005a:1). The most used learning theories—behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism—all share the concept that knowledge is objective and obtainable through explanation or experience (Hendricks, 2019).

Behaviourism understands learning as something that is largely unknowable (Siemens, 2005a). Cognitivism posits that learning is a process of inputs being stored and coded in the memory to be recalled later. Both behaviourism and cognitivism suggest that learning is a process of knowledge being internalized by the learner (ibid). Constructivism sees learning as the construction of knowledge through experiencing and actively creating meaning (Driscoll, 2000). As for any learning theory, these traditional learning theories have their own strengths and shortcomings (Siemens, 2005a).

The main factor behind my decision not to apply these conventional learning theories is that these theories were developed before technology became such a prominent element in our everyday life, thus in education (Hendricks, 2019). Moreover, these theories exclusively address learning that appears within the individual (Siemens, 2005a). They do not consider learning as a process outside of a person, such as technology enhanced learning processes (ibid).

Connectivism offers a deeper understanding of the complexities of learning, while considering technological improvements (Siemens, 2005a). Kop and Hill (2008) argue that connectivism does not aim to discard previous learning theories. Its goal is to build on older learning theories while addressing current learning principles (Kop & Hill, 2008). Connectivism, by challenging traditional classroom learning processes, formulates a theoretical construct for learning in the digital age (Siemens, 2005a).

3.2 Connectivism

The basic premise of connectivism is that “our ability to learn what we need for tomorrow is more important than what we know today” (Siemens, 2005a:6).

Connectivism describes learning as a process that occurs in environments of continuously altering foundations (Siemens, 2005a). It is the integration of the theoretical concepts of chaos, complexity (Gleick, 1987), self-organization (Rocha, 1998; Wiley & Edwards, 2002) and networks (Siemens, 2005a). As we’ve moved into this accelerated, digital age, learning can no longer encompass simply what we’ve personally experienced. There is just too much to know, and it continues to grow. Siemens (2005a) argues that we are unable on our own to experience everything we need to know in this age. Thus, we need to learn not just current knowledge, but the tools and habits that help us learn what we need to know in the future. Learning how to create meanings, form connections, all while leveraging technology, is the learning method of the future (ibid).

3.2.1 Chaos, complexity, self-organization and networks

Our accelerated digital age has seen the collapse of predictability, also known as *chaos* (Siemens, 2005a). To deal with this chaos, learning has had to evolve. Connectivism provides a path through this chaos by acknowledging that everything is connected to everything else, making up a *complex* interconnected whole. Siemens (2005a) demonstrates that knowledge is continuously growing and evolving. He emphasizes our dependence on preliminary conditions (ibid). Thus, what we learn and how we act depends on what we have learned already. Learners need a way to make sense of the complex environment of the modern, digital age.

Connectivism states that recognizing patterns, adjusting to them, and making decisions under these conditions, are key elements of modern learning activities (ibid). As new information is continuously available it is crucial to decide what information is important and what information needs to be discarded (Siemens, 2005a). This requires a skill of organization. *Self-organization* is defined as spontaneous shift to organized structures, patterns and behaviors from unpredictable conditions (Rocha, 1998). Self-organization as a learning activity requiring informational openness, spontaneity and adaptability (Siemens, 2005a). “Self-organization on a personal level is a micro-process of the larger self-organizing knowledge constructs created within corporate or institutional environments” (Siemens, 2005a:5). Thus, to learn in an

environment of *chaos* and *complexity*, we need to learn how to constantly ingest new information, discarding what is unnecessary and adapting what is valuable in a constant process of *self-organization*.

Learning, of course, does not happen in a vacuum. Digital technologies have created an explosion of ways for humans to connect. These digital social networks have increased the speed and number of connections, and the flow of information (Siemens, 2005a). This increased flow of information both provides the learner with new knowledge, but also the challenge to know what information to discard, and what to keep (ibid).

Connectivism theorizes human and non-human learning communities as nodes (Hendricks, 2019). Nodes can be individuals, groups, communities or systems (ibid). Nodes compete for connections, and they merge into an interconnected whole. *Networks* are the entirety of the connections between nodes (Barabási, 2002). Siemens defines networks as a synthesis of learning resources that store and create information (Siemens, 2005b). The greater number of connections represents a higher chance of survival (Siemens, 2005a). In regards to learning activities, the likelihood of an activity to become successful depends on how well it is connected to other nodes (ibid). Learning activities that focus on specialization and mastery have a greater chance to gain recognition, resulting in strengthened connections (ibid).

3.2.2 Principles of connectivism

Connectivism is theorized around the individual (Siemens, 2005a). The cycle of global knowledge merges into and branches from personal knowledge. The individual adds knowledge to the network, from there it feeds into organizations and institutions. Organizations and institutions in turn influence the networks. Finally, knowledge makes its way back to the individuals in forms of new information (Siemens, 2005a:6). This loop of connections assures that knowledge stays accurate (ibid).

As Siemens (2005a) outlines, the principles of connectivism are the following:

- Learning and knowledge lies in variety of viewpoints
- Learning is a process of forming connection between information nodes

- Learning can reside outside of the individual in non-human devices
- The ability to know more is more important than what we know already
- To increase our knowledge, sustaining and fostering connections are needed
- It is crucial to have the ability to see through the connections
- Decision making is a learning process by itself
- Having precise and up to date knowledge in the main aim (Siemens, 2005:6-7)

Later, Siemens supplemented the above listed principles to elaborate the essence of connectivism (Al-Shehri, 2011):

- Learning has an end goal, use of the knowledge is important
- Learning happens in various forms
- Personal and organizational learning are collaborative processes
- Considering cognition and emotions is important. Siemens emphasizes the need to take into account how cognition and emotions are influencing each other (Al-Shehri, 2011)

As opposed to the previously mentioned traditional learning theories (behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism), learning through a connectivism lens is seen as a process that can both reside in and outside of a human being, and with the growth of information technology, within electronic and human networks (Siemens, 2005a; Hendricks, 2019).

Based on connectivist understanding, learning is defined not only as knowledge intake and memorisation, but is seen as a knowledge creation process (Kop & Hill, 2008). Connectivism argues that learning is determined by connections, and that knowledge is distributed within networks (Hendricks, 2019). Therefore, learning is seen as *actionable* knowledge, that focuses on connecting sets of information, and in doing so, empowers the learner (ibid).

Under a connectivist viewpoint, learning is rooted in a rich set of available information and connections (Siemens, 2005a). Connectivism states that one's personal knowledge is formed by one's connection to learning communities (Hendricks, 2019). Learners are obligated to collect, categorize and prioritise information (ibid). Their learning is defined by their ability to navigate through complex networks (Hendricks, 2019).

3.2.3 Connectivism as a learning theory for distance education

Though connectivism has its critics (Verhaegen, 2006; Kerr 2007), a number of scholars have used it as a learning theory applied to study distance education (Al-Shehri, 2011; Hendricks, 2019). As a learning theory, it encourages learner-centered education methods by challenging the traditional classroom environment and switching the control from teacher to the lifelong learner (Siemens, 2005a).

Looking at distance learning through a connectivist lens, virtual learning environments are the networks through which the learner becomes a part of the “social creation and social construction of knowledge” (Hendricks, 2019:2). Connectivism applied to distance learning, recognizes the connection (learning) between geographically distant communities (nodes) (Hendricks, 2019). This theory assumes that learners have access to networks (virtual learning environments) and that they are technologically literate. Therefore, technological devices that assure the connection between nodes play crucial roles in distance learning environments (ibid).

As learning occurs in a networked environment, according to connectivism, the main task of distance learning should be to expose students to networks (Hendricks, 2019). Connectivism focuses on teaching by example. Thus, it’s not solely the teacher’s responsibility to create and assess knowledge. Learners teach teachers and each other in virtual learning environments. Connectivist learning places put knowledge production ahead of knowledge consumption (ibid).

Proponents of connectivism claim that learners of the digital age should be more independent and autonomous (Al-Shehri, 2011). Students should be allowed to research and access information with the use of Internet, although under an appropriate and overseen manner. Students need to have the ability to update their knowledge and leave non-relevant information behind (ibid). The guidelines of connectivism includes the recommendation that information should be attained from different sources, keeping the network diverse. Student must be allowed to form connections with other individuals to express and share diverse opinions. Finally, connectivism states that student should have the right for authentic and experimental

learning. To assure that, they should have the ability to locate and research information persistently (Al-Shehri, 2011).

In summary, connectivism as a learning theory puts the learner in the centre, where learning can reside within and outside of the individual (Siemens, 2005a). Knowledge is constructed and connected through external human and non-human connections. Technology enhanced connections play a crucial role in maintaining these connections (nodes), through which integrated knowledge is generated (network). The Connectivist perspective underlines that the ability to learn is more important than what we know today (ibid). It highlights the importance of self-decisions between unimportant and important information, and to keep knowledge current (ibid).

Connectivism removes obstacles to access to education (Hendricks, 2019). Learning can occur irrespective of distance, place and time. It can be done anywhere at any time, making it more accessible for vulnerable groups (ibid).

Ukrainian learners residing in Hungary can join virtual learning communities through distance education. They can connect to networks, and though the nodes of their education may be scattered geographically, if we take connectivism as a valid learning theory, their prospects to learn are still present. This study uses connectivism as a theoretical framework to analyze the perspectives on their learning opportunities. The next section will introduce the method and materials that were analyzed to conduct this study.

4. Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter is devoted to introducing the research design. First, it covers the ontological and epistemological standpoint of this research, by doing so it introduces the philosophical stances underpinning the study. It presents reflexivity considerations. It further, elaborates on the method selection process and how the collected data was processed and analyzed. Finally, it discusses ethical considerations, and issues of reliability and validity.

4.2 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy introduces the fundamental philosophical framework that influences and guides the process of this research. It aims to identify underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge. Ontology deals with the nature of the social world (Halperin & Heath 2020). Epistemology “is the study of the nature, extent, and justification of knowledge” (Rosenberg, 2015:11). It aims to grasp what we know and how we know (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

I lean towards the position that not everything can be directly observed in the social world around us. I share the opinion that to understand unobservable facts such as opportunities, interests, preferences, and norms, we need to make inferences on observable things, therefore my research philosophy tends towards realism (Perry & Bellamy, 2011). Realism states that the inferences formed around unobservable things are true or false, depending on how closely they align with the actual fact (ibid). I consider education opportunities to be an unobservable element that requires careful examination when it is being studied.

4.2.1. Ontological standpoints of realism

A realist ontological standpoint states that our knowledge, at any given moment, can only approximate the truth, we are unable to fully grasp the truth (ibid). This is because many things are unobservable. Moreover, because the knowledge we already own stems from “inherently incomplete observations” (Perry & Bellamy, 2011:60).

4.2.2. Epistemological standpoints of realism

To draw sufficient inferences, deciding what is important about the determinate fact is crucial (Perry & Bellamy, 2011). To make this decision, it is important to adopt an appropriate and well-organized theoretical framework. A fundamental principle of realist epistemology is that all empirical knowledge is temporary, since all theoretical and conceptual frameworks that we use to understand our world cannot be directly observed. A realist epistemological stance

emphasizes that improving theories and concepts is essential to developing our knowledge (ibid).

My personal view corresponds with realism, as I agree with the importance of improving and developing concepts, and theories around social phenomena. And I accept the statement that we are unable to attain a full comprehension of the truth.

4.3 Positionality Statement

To provide transparency and credibility to this qualitative research, I would like to address potential biases and personal perspectives that might influence the research process. As stated at the beginning, my method selection and the decision on interviewing social workers was influenced by my social worker background.

Based on my own social worker opinion, there is no general educational path for Ukrainian refugees residing in Hungary. Some children follow the Ukrainian online education, others are enrolled in the Hungarian national schooling system, or they participate in educational support activities provided by humanitarian actors. Some do all simultaneously, and in some cases, children entirely lack formal and non-formal educational activities.

Experiencing the scarcity of educational opportunities for this group, and interacting with children who are enrolled in the Hungarian national schooling system, influenced my decision to conduct expert interviews with social workers who aim to promote refugees' social well-being, including their access to education.

I wanted to interview a group of professionals who are knowledgeable about the educational requirements and opportunities for this group. Additionally, my priority was to interview professionals who are potentially in contact with children following various educational journeys, or with kids who are out of school. Some of the interviewees were with previous colleagues, some I've met through conferences, and others I was advised to reach out to by previous interviewees.

4.4 Method and Material

For collecting data, I applied purposive sampling, and I conducted expert interviews. Therefore, the study fully relies on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. Conducting expert interviews offers first-hand knowledge from individuals who own relevant expertise (Halperin & Heath 2020). In this study, I relied on a few selected individuals to reflect on the role of distance education for the affected group. The criteria for the selection are presented in the next subsection.

4.4.1 Sample

For sample selection, I primarily applied purposive sampling, although one of the respondents fell under the category of snowball sampling. Applying purposive sampling and snowball sampling is likely to involve the researcher's personal bias (Halperin & Heath 2020). I primarily looked for social workers working at organizations that offered educational support for Ukrainian refugees in the 2023/2024 educational year in Hungary. To select the optional organizations I used the Service Map created by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2024c).

The participation was fully anonymous and voluntary. Assuming that the interviews will deal with sensitive topics, I decided not to name exactly the organization where my interviewees work, although the nature of the organizations is shared. All the interviewees currently work to promote Ukrainians' well-being through providing social work services under NGO and INGO organizations within Hungary, mainly in the capital Budapest. The five respondents work for four different organizations.

Criteria interviewees were required to meet:

1. A person who is legally employed as a social worker.
2. A person who is providing social work services for Ukrainian child refugees residing in Hungary.

3. A social worker, who is in contact with clients participating in the Ukrainian blended distance education program.
4. A person, who has at least twelve months of experience working with the affected group.

The interview requests were sent to eight individuals, six of whom are in the social network of me as a researcher, and two that prior interviewees recommended I contact. All interviewees were formally invited to participate, where I introduced the aim of the research, the sample criteria, the research questions, and asked for their informed consent. Out of eight individuals, five agreed to participate in the research. The invitation letter and the interview guide are attached in the appendixes of this paper.

4.4.3. Data collection

For collecting data, I offered in-person and online interview opportunities. Attached to the interview invitation, participants were able to book an interview appointment directly on my calendar. Sixty minutes were allotted to conduct one interview. Two interviews were conducted in person, and one online. Due to interviewees schedules, two of the participants answered my questions by email.

Interviewees were offered to conduct the interviews in English or Hungarian, our native language. Out of five interviewees, four chose Hungarian and one English. The interviewees were given titles as respondent 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 to respect their privacy.

Table 5 Interview participants

	Type of organization	Work experience as a social worker with Ukrainian refugees	Main area as a social worker
1	NGO	2.5 years	Case management
2	NGO	16 months	Community events / art pedagogy

3	NGO	2 years	Case management/ educational support classes
4	NGO	2 years	Education
5	INGO	12 months	Child protection

4.4.4. Analysis

All interviews were recorded, then transcribed, so that common themes could be identified and analyzed. I used TurboScribe for transcription. The printed materials were coded manually. After identifying the sections of interest, the relevant data was translated from Hungarian to English.

Although the semi-structured nature of the interviews aimed to keep the interviews structured and applicable for theoretical analysis, all respondents slightly deviated from the research topic. Instead of exclusively dealing with distance education opportunities for Ukrainian refugees, the interviews dealt a lot with assessing the Hungarian national school system regarding refugee education. They all brought it up as an element that affects the popularity of distance learning opportunities. This shift of focus impacted the analysis of the material.

4.4.5. Themes and codes

I applied a thematic analysis to the research using five themes. My research led me to adapt these themes to the scope and the direction of the interviews. They are meant to capture the characteristics and elements of distance education, as well as the broader context of Ukrainian educational opportunities in Hungary.

The first three themes of *chaos and complexity*, *network and connection*, and *decision-making* are adapted from connectivism.

In my interviews, references to the incompetencies of the Hungarian education system were a recurring pattern. This led me to add the theme *views on the Hungarian national education system* to the analysis. It deals with the constraints of the national educational system and how it affects the perception of distance educational opportunities by the affected population.

Finally the *Manoeuvring as a social worker* theme deals with the role of social workers in navigating between the challenges and opportunities of distance education provided for the affected group within Hungary.

The identified themes and codes are:

Theme 1 - chaos and complexity: chaotic, trauma, war, complex

Theme 2 - network and connection: social needs, emotional needs, connection, network

Theme 3 - decision making: planning, dedication, precarious, mandatory

Theme 4 - views on the Hungarian national education system: national education, Hungarian

Theme 5 - Manoeuvring as a social worker : social work, support, information

4.5 Ethical considerations

To ensure the transparency and credibility of the research, an official interview invitation and an informed consent form was provided to each participant as it is a crucial feature of social sciences research ethics (Oliver, 2010). The interview invitation, which is attached below as an appendix, clearly explains the purpose of the study and introduces the method of data collection and the process of analysis. Participants were informed of their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. To ensure that the participation caused no harm to the interviewee the data was handled confidentially, respecting the privacy of the interviewees.

5. Findings and analysis

This chapter presents and analyses the material of this research. It is dedicated to examine the data collected through expert interviews conducted with social workers. The chapter is divided into five sections, each section deals with one theme at once. Finally, the current chapter is followed by a conclusion chapter.

As explained before, the research aims to shed light on distance learning's role for Ukrainian children residing in Hungary from a social worker's perspective. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the role of distance education for Ukrainian child refugees in Hungary?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities of distance education for this group?
3. How do social workers in Hungary navigate these challenges and opportunities?

The findings clearly show that distance education for Ukrainian children in Hungary cannot be evaluated without assessing the educational context it appears in, that is, the opportunities offered by the Hungarian national school. As such, the themes drawn from connectivism are used in a way that encompass a broader contextual setting.

All but one interviewee stated that they were not officially informed about the conditions and requirements of Ukrainian online distance education and did not participate in workshops or cross-organizational meetings organized dedicated to this topic. They are not in contact with Ukrainian teachers, nor Ukrainian educational organizations. Their opinion is based on their experience working with Ukrainian students, parents and other professionals within the Hungarian educational, child protection and humanitarian sphere. They all had cases where school age refugee kid followed both educational systems in parallel, or followed only one system, or did not participate in formal education at all.

Before introducing the findings I would like to highlight that every interviewee reiterated the fact that the educational needs, opportunities and outcomes are unique for every person. There are examples of lucky students whose learning needs are fulfilled, and tragic examples of students who fall under child protection because of abuse or other crises, but that the general condition are students who make the best of the situation they are in, as complicated as it might be. Through the interviews I tried to grasp the general conditions in Hungary.

5.1 Theme 1. Chaos and complexity

Siemens (2015a) defined chaos as the collapse of predictability. Complexity refers to the interconnectedness of everything around us. These concepts are fundamental to understand distance education through the lens of connectivism (ibid).

The concepts of chaos and complexity are employed to understand not only distance education for Ukrainian refugee children in Hungary, but to interrogate the context in which the students find themselves. I apply these concepts to the lived reality of these children, identifying how the very skills of adaptability, decision-making, and connection forming are the skills that these students need in their day to day lives, not only in school. In other words, connectivism can help us understand that life under conditions of chaos and complexity is an education in of itself.

Interviewees claimed that the opportunity for Ukrainian children to follow education online is a complex issue in Hungary. For everyone legally residing in Hungary, whether they are dual citizens or refugees, it is mandatory to participate in the Hungarian system if they are under the age 16. Based on the interviewees' opinion, the opportunity to follow Ukrainian distance education creates a non-legal alternative that replaces the Hungarian national school participation obligation. This results in a situation where some children do not study formally at all.

Interviewee 1 emphasized that distance education is already a complex question, even before factoring in the hectic, uncertain situation of displaced people. She claimed that:

“The opportunity to learn through distance education might have developed because no one knew how long the war will last. People didn't know how long they will stay in exile, and if they should continue their journey to another country. This way [learning through distance education] they can continue studying from wherever.”

Additionally, she claimed that if we look at the distance learning opportunities offered, we need to make the distinction between Transcarpathian refugees, who often speak Hungarian at some

level (and are often dual Hungarian-Ukrainian citizens), and refugees from other Ukrainian regions who neither speak Hungarian, nor have citizenship.

She also raised concerns regarding learning outcomes:

“I am sceptical about how [distance education] works. For me, it is a question of how and with what intensity online education is followed. I have not seen a single child actually using the platform, or any certificate”

She mentioned that she thinks most people today still do not think that their stay in Hungary will be long-term, therefore they’ve chosen to exclusively follow Ukrainian distance education. This precarity makes their situation untenable.

She continued:

“For me, the main question is, first of all, whether the goal is their [Ukrainian refugees] inclusion or integration. I think that in many cases we should just create space for them to start working on their traumas during their stay in Hungary. We [Hungary] should be an inclusive society, and not exploit them, for example in labour. Unfortunately, we can see examples of that.”

Interviewee 2 is a social worker mainly responsible for community organizations and art pedagogy classes. The interviewee claimed that it is a challenge for kids to align between the Hungarian and Ukrainian systems, as class times often conflict, especially if they want to participate in supplementary classes provided by humanitarian organizations.

“Those children who participate in formal education [Ukrainian or Hungarian] for real, and even take part in my educational programs outside of school are terribly exhausted. The opportunity for distance education is seen as a modern reform-pedagogical step, but in real life the kids are overwhelmed.

As was mentioned before, the findings show that when the educational opportunities are assessed, the distinction should be made between students who speak Hungarian and those who do not. Interviewees 1, 2, and 3 mentioned age as another filter. They claimed that at younger

ages children pick up new language much easier, therefore integrating them into the Hungarian system is more beneficial in most cases.

Interviewee 2 emphasized that it also important what kind of education kids followed beforehand, and whether this education was already by distance, or traditional classroom based studies. Children who have only encountered distance learning, for example those who started school during COVID, are impacted differently to teenagers who know what it is like to study in a classroom environment.

Interviewee 3 claimed it is hard to tell if the opportunity to learn through distance learning is generally beneficial or harmful for the affected children. She emphasized that it is an especially complex issue since it touches legal concerns.

“The opportunity for distance learning gives an excuse to school age refugees not to participate in the Hungarian national school system, which they are legally entitled to enrol in”.

Since the Hungarian system cannot offer learning materials in Ukrainian, most children who enroll continue their education at a lower educational level. Therefore, the most prominent role of distance learning addressed by interviewee 3 is that children can continue their studies in their own language, and as such they can continue their studies without repeating educational years.

Interviewee 4 claimed that the education of Ukrainian refugee children is a complex issue, with many factors to consider, such as place of residence, age, emotional and social state, family's financial situation, language skills, etc. Distance education also has its advantages and disadvantages, just like traditional classroom education. The best solution depends on the child's individual needs and circumstances.

She highlighted that distance learning can offer safe learning opportunities under chaotic circumstance, such as an ongoing war. Just as interviewee 3, she claimed that in Ukrainian refugees' case, the big advantage of distance learning is the continuous connection and the uninterrupted flow of education.

Interviewee 5 emphasized that in some cases, ensuring the environment to participate in distance education is itself characterized by complexity. On top of the virtual human connections, an internet connection is needed, as well as a laptop or mobile phone, and a place where the student can focus on their study. These conditions are hard to provide, especially when families are beginning to flee.

This theme, *chaos and complexity*, aimed to contextualize the situation Ukrainian refugees face in Hungary. By gaining more insight into the complexity of their educational opportunities it hopefully provides a clear background to understand the significance of next two themes: *network and connection* (theme 2) and *decision making* (theme 3).

5.2 Theme 2. Network and connection

Connectivism describes learning communities as nodes, whether they are human, or non-human learning communities (Hendricks, 2019). These nodes, through connections form networks (Barabás, 2002). In the case of this study, I consider Ukrainian children as nodes, who through connections belong to different networks.

I believe that participating in educational environments (formal, non-formal, informal) are one of the most important ways to form connections. Theme 2, *network and connection* deals with the notion of networks, and how Ukrainian children residing in Hungary are included or excluded from various networks. By exploring the perspectives on distance education, this theme's findings revolve around the emotional and social learning needs of the children.

Interviewee 1 stated that participation in online education for Ukrainian children is a way to stay in touch with networks they formed home. Although, participating in the Hungarian system would offer new connections, new networks that might be more beneficial for their life in Hungary.

“I think in many cases the parent doesn't even know what their child is losing by choosing online education [in the Ukrainian system] over learning in the Hungarian system.”

Other than mentioning that different educational methods offer participation in different networks, she mentioned her concern regarding virtual learning communities. She believes distance education *“takes away the in-person communication skills”*.

Throughout the interview interviewee 2 emphasized the role of ethnic ties and keeping cultural traditions alive. She claimed that distance learning helps to maintain the connection children have with their roots. It strengthens national consciousness, and helps students to form a *“community of destiny.”*

She also mentioned that regardless of the virtual community, there is a high chance that children will become isolated, especially ones who live in rural Hungary.

Interviewee 3 found distance education as such: *“I think on the one hand it's good because it connects the children with their life in Ukraine, with their friends and teachers there, and then they don't have to start all over again, they have a little bond with their home. It is a tiny string which through the can continue their life they had home.”* She claims that distance education might offer a *‘peace of mind’* for the students. An opportunity for them to learn with other children in similar shoes, while they study in a language they understand.

She also mentioned some concerns. First, that moving from face-to-face education to an online space is complicated on its own. It transforms the connection between teacher and student, and between students. Since there is very little connection between Hungarian support organizations and the Ukrainian educators, it is hard to notice if a student misses class or is not participating in education at all.

Interviewee 4 stated that though the learning needs might be fulfilled through distance education, on its own it cannot provide the social and emotional needs students require. People need human connection to maintain their human network. They require support and in person interactions with their peers and teachers.

“Distance education cannot fully satisfy the emotional needs of refugee children. Distance learning cannot replace personal contact with teachers and peers, which plays an important role in maintaining children's mental health and well-being.”

She states that it is important that distance education be complemented by other forms of education, and that related services be available for the students such as personal counselling, cultural programs, and leisure activities that they can share with their schoolmates. She thinks these events can help refugee children integrate into Hungarian society, make new friends and live happier, healthier lives.

5.3 Theme 3. Decision-making

The refugee experience is a harrowing one, full of difficult decisions. Parents make critical decisions between putting their children in school, or abstaining from it. Sometimes, they have to choose between educational methods. Students make their own decisions on how much they will study, and eventually how far they will go in their studies. These decision can be understood from multiple angles. Learning within formal educational environments is regulated by law. It might be influenced by relatives, and as traditional learning theories states, it depends on interpersonal processes (Siemens, 2005a). This theme analyses the findings around *decision-making* of the affected population.

Interviewee 1 pointed out that since we are talking about children at a compulsory school age, going to school is not fully their own decision. Parents and legal guardian are responsible to enrol the children in educational institutions and to support their educational journey. To decide between the Ukrainian distance education and the Hungarian traditional classroom education is thus often the parents' decision.

She highlighted that there decisions with varying short-term and long-term benefits, and it is not always easy to see the difference:

“I remember many parents and children raised concerns in the first months about the discrimination and language barriers refugee students face in Hungarian schools, which strengthened to their decision to continue online education. But now, more than two years later, I wonder how many of them think they made the wrong decision in the long term. Many children who started Hungarian schools right after their arrival speak great Hungarian now. Whereas children who followed online education speak Hungarian significantly worse or not at all.”

Interviewee 1 claimed that the decision of which education system to enrol in was not always about the education at all. She claimed that families choosing to only follow the Ukrainian system was a form of general denial against their situation. She concluded that many parents think their child's educational needs are fulfilled by online education, and they don't think about what opportunities they are taking away from the children by not educating them in the Hungarian system.

“In some cases I felt that online education kept the parents in denial. They say integrating into the Hungarian society is not needed, since soon they will be able to go home soon, although many of them have been here for almost 2,5 years. I have client whose integration didn't progress in the past years at all, they still require the same weekly social support as in the early stages of their refugee experience.”

Interviewee 2 believes that families have very different opinions about what is the right decision in this situation. She claims that behind the decision to choose distance education lies a strong national identity.

“They try to keep their national identity, for example the decision not to enrol kindergarten children in the Hungarian school system contributes a lot to this. Parents insist that their children study Ukrainian history and literature in Ukrainian.”

Interviewee 3, as an online teacher and social worker herself, delved more into interpersonal processes. She stated that motivation critical in deciding to learn and for reaching successful learning outcomes. She argued that education without in person interaction is more monotone, and it is harder to catch if a student is stuck with the task, which in turn makes it harder to motivate and support them.

Interviewee 4, just as Interviewee 3, focused on the children self-decision to study.

“For the success of distance learning, consistency, a tendency to self-study and dedication are important. It is crucial to decide to sit down to study. The willingness to do so, varies from person to person”.

Interviewee 5, based on her personal experience with refugees residing in Budapest, shared the following:

“Based on parents’ opinion, distance learning facilities provided by Ukrainian schools were useful and sufficient. Children had similar opinions, although they found it harder than learning in person, mostly because of the lack of motivation. They said it is harder to pay attention and to be actively participate as they don’t meet their teacher and classmates.”

Moreover, she claimed that the lack of everyday routine of experiencing social interactions with teachers and peers decreases the motivation to actively participate during classes.

After structuring the findings around themes drawn upon concepts derived from connectivism. The next two theme turn towards views on the Hungarian national educational system as an alternative to Ukrainian distance education and toward social workers’ role in navigating between the challenges and opportunities to support individual’s wellbeing.

5.4 Theme 4. Ukrainians in the Hungarian national educational system

All interviews assessed the Ukrainian distance education, reflecting on the Hungarian national school system’s response regarding refugee education. Applying theme 4, the analysis explores how the Hungarian national education system offered opportunities for Ukrainian refugees.

All interviewee uniformly stated the Hungarian system was not prepared to deal effectively with traumatised children from a different culture and speaking a different language. In general, there are huge shortcomings in the education system, with a chronic lack of teachers and high-class sizes that affects Hungarian children as well. The interviewees mention that there are examples of flexible and helpful teachers and directors within national education, but the general experience is the opposite.

Interviewee 1 believes that there was a no single thought given to what would be effective for the refugee children. She also added that in this situation neither the child nor the teacher is prepared. She believes that the initial difficulties could have been overcome if there had been more desire to solve the situation.

“I think they've [Hungarian government] made the Ukrainian children participation mandatory in the Hungarian system, but they haven't put in place any tools to make it feasible or easier to meet the mandatory requirements.

She claims that the biggest disadvantage of the Hungarian system is that Ukrainian children follow the same curriculum as Hungarian children and face the same and expectations. Therefore, many Ukrainians are repeating classes, mainly because they can't catch up with the requirement due to language barriers.

She believes another deficiency of the Hungarian educational system is that Ukrainian professionals have not been screened out and included in educational provision for Ukrainian students. This was mentioned by Interviewee 2 as well.

“It is still a big question for me why the Ukrainian-Hungarian relations were not exploited. I assume a bunch of Ukrainian professionals also fled. Why were they not integrated into the Hungarian system? Especially since there are quite a lot of bilingual people among Transcarpathians.

Interviewee 2 claims that there was a definite initial exclusion at schools, but with time children started to feel better, especially the younger ones who learned Hungarian much easier. She shared the feedback from children who study in the Hungarian system:

“They [the Ukrainian children] know exactly how many [other] Ukrainians go to their school, who goes to which class and where they came from. The bond is strong.”

Interviewee 3 supported the previous observation and highlighted that the Hungarian national system is especially hard for teenagers who don't speak Hungarian at all.

Interviewee 5 stated that, according to parents, both educational systems has deficiencies in providing effective education to children. In her experience, children had difficulties with integrating into Hungarian classes and understanding the material due to language barriers. These problems occurred in almost all the families she was working with.

5.5 Theme 5. Manoeuvring as a social worker

Finally, the last theme is organising the findings around the role of social workers.

Based on the findings, social workers could act as an intermediary between the institution and the client. Social workers should provide information to the individual rather than tell them what to do and what not to do. They must be able to explain the legal requirements in the country and what are the consequences are for not following the rules.

Interviewee 1 states that:

“It is our task to help them to find their way around the system, assist them within any administration process if necessary, and to make sure they can trust us.”

Interviewee 2 described social workers role as manoeuvring. *“This situation is a legal exposure, while we know what is mandatory, we know that is not necessarily effective. We try to represent the country's rules and regulations, to meet the requirements, but in the meantime, we are often ineffective, and we know that the mandatory solution is not necessarily practical.”*

Interviewee 4 stated that distance education forms must be supplemented with other forms of support. Interviewee 3 believes that the task of social workers is often to create an educational environment that would have been the task of the educational system. Social workers organize supplementary educational classes, mostly catch-up classes and language classes, that benefit kids who are enroled in the distance system as well as the ones who are integrated into the Hungarian system.

Findings show that social worker main role is to be a contact and mediator between the individual, the government, INGO/NGO organizations, educational institutions, child welfare services, and other relevant actors. They reach out and maintain relationships with these entities and delegate families towards the most appropriate facilities where children can be supported in their studies. A holistic approach is needed where different professionals and organisations

from different field support the children at the same time (psychologist, child welfare social worker, teacher, tutor daycare institutions, etc.)

Social workers can spread information, for example if they hear of a strong reliable educational organisation they can recommend it to parents. Or if they notice a child protection case they can report it in a professional manner. They can include the children in donation projects that are focusing on making education more accessible, such as laptop and tablet distribution.

In addition to assisting in social services, creating community events were highlighted as a primary service offered by social workers in connection to education. Findings show that these events main role is to give back what current educational systems cannot offer: community, a safe space, opportunities to connect and to develop friendships that are finally not virtual.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Overview

This paper aimed to examine Ukrainian refugees' distance learning opportunities within Hungary. As Ukrainian refugees are legally entitled to participate in the Hungarian formal education system, understanding why families still choose to study under Ukrainian distance education, and what effect this choice has on students, can shed light on distance education as a strategy for refugee education in general.

To offer a contextual background, the paper introduces the international framework around refugee education and technology's role in refugee education. It highlights the fact that there is a significant gap between policy measurement and real-life implementations, which emphasizes the need to study such topics. To address the peculiarity of refugee education in Hungary, the study explains the Ukrainian and Hungarian educational system, as well as its legal requirements and opportunities.

As previously stated, my personal experience as a social worker inspired me to study the multifaceted nature of refugee education within Hungary and to rely on data collected from social workers through expert interviews.

The questions leading the study are framed around the role of distance education for Ukrainians residing in Hungary, its challenges and benefits, and how social workers can navigate between the negative and positive characteristics of distance learning.

Considering the learning theory of the digital age, connectivism, the theoretical framework is built around the concepts of chaos, complexity, networks, and decision-making. These concepts mean to capture the characteristics and elements of distance education, as well as the broader context of Ukrainian educational opportunities in Hungary. These concepts inspire the themes, that are applied to analyze the findings as well.

The findings reveal that the interviewees, all social workers, are in daily contact with children enrolled in the Ukrainian distance education, in the Hungarian system, and children who are out of school. The interviewees were skeptical of the efficacy of distance learning. None had seen documentation of distance learners' educational achievements. The interviewees claimed that it is hard for students to follow the mandatory Hungarian classes and Ukrainian distance education at the same time, which compels most children and their parents to decide between the two systems. The findings reveal that this serious decision that is often blurred by their own denial of their refugee status.

The result highlights that Ukrainian children's education in Hungary is deeply affected by the precarious duration of their flight, by language barriers, age, location, previous educational achievements, their emotional and social state, and even their family's financial situation. The findings concludes that the best educational solution depends on the child's individual needs and circumstances.

Research reveals that the role of distance education for Ukrainian children in Hungary is to offer a safe and uninterrupted flow of education in their native language, without repeating classes. It offers a virtual community with other Ukrainian students, through which they can maintain a tie to the home they left behind. This virtual community appears to strengthen their national consciousness and ethnic ties.

Regardless of the positive attributes of distance learning, the analysis clearly states that the opportunity for distance learning gives an excuse to school-age refugees not to participate in

the Hungarian national school system, which they are legally entitled to. Not attending the Hungarian system hinders the development of their Hungarian language skills, which is critical for their long-term residency in Hungary. As the collected data demonstrates, distance education cannot fully satisfy the educational needs of refugee children without other forms of education. It might fulfill their immediate learning needs but cannot fully satisfy emotional and social educational needs. The findings reveal that distance education takes away in-person communication skills and creates a high chance for children to become isolated, especially for those who live in rural Hungary.

The analysis uncovers that the Hungarian national system, in which it is mandatory to participate in, is generally overwhelmed and with few resources even for Hungarian students. It is not prepared to educate children affected by trauma, with different cultural backgrounds, and speaking foreign languages. This situation creates a tension between legal obligations and efficiency, which students, parents, and professionals need to face. The findings find that there are resources, such as Ukrainian-Hungarian teachers, whose expertise was not taken advantage of.

The analysis reveals that the role of social workers is versatile and the services they provide are interconnected. They respond to social-educational needs by giving information, providing catch-up and language classes, offering mediation between different actors, offering psychological first aid for refugees, assisting in social service administration processes, and organizing educational donation distributions. Moreover, they create safe spaces and community events where refugee children can connect with each other in person. This is especially important for children who only participate in distance education and who are out of school.

6.2 Limitations

The study faced several limitations that affected the generalizability of the results, such as sampling, translation, and time limitations which were elaborated in the introduction chapter.

Additional limitation to consider is the choice of the theory, which the theoretical framework and analysis aimed to build around.

The analysis uncovers that the interviewees had not received any official information on the system of distance education. This lack of knowledge affected the depth of their understanding of distance education. As a social worker in Hungary myself, I know that the humanitarian sector is underfinanced and suffers from labor shortages while dealing with a large number of beneficiaries and covering a wide range of social needs. These conditions might be a reason why professionals don't have a high level of expertise in every single issue they work with, such as the structure of distance education.

The interviewee's level of knowledge shifted the focus of the study from assessing distance education on its own. Instead, they compared it with the Hungarian national education. They shared insights relating to emotional and social educational needs, therefore choosing connectivism might not be the most applicable theory to assess the distance learning method.

6.3 Future research recommendations

For future studies, I would recommend investigating the role of distance learning from those directly affected, including children and parents who participate in distance education, as well as the educational professionals who run the programs.

In case a follow-up study would be done, I would assess social workers' perspectives on navigating the Hungarian educational system, supplemented by views collected from childcare services and Hungarian teachers. Using a theory that focuses on social and emotional educational needs, such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1997), might also be more relevant.

6.4. Final thoughts

All in all, this study demonstrates the complexity of learning opportunities for Ukrainian refugees residing in Hungary. The results through the lens of social workers' experience emphasize that distance education should be complemented by other forms of education to satisfy educational needs. The study explores the challenges and benefits of available learning

opportunities, while keeping in mind that educational needs, opportunities, and outcomes are different for everyone. Despite the shared insight, the study faces certain limitations, which indicates the importance of further research.

Overall, the study aims to contribute to the literature on refugee education provision and to draw attention to the necessity for effective, accessible, and quality education for all.

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Official interview invitation

Hi, thank you for your time reading this invitation letter. I am Nikolett Kubik, and I am a master's student at Malmö University, studying International Migration and Ethnic Relations. For my thesis about Ukrainian child refugee education, I am conducting interviews with social workers, working in Hungary with the affected group. I would like to invite you to participate in this study to understand distance and remote refugee education at primary and secondary levels. The content of the study is introduced below.

I want to inform you that I won't use any personal information in the essay. You are allowed to skip any question, pause, or stop the interview. All documentation and recordings follow the GDPR and MAU policy. In case, you are interested in the final paper, it will be shared with you.

The interviews could be conducted in person, or through Zoom call. Through the Calendly link below, you can book your preferred time to conduct the interview. If you don't find any time that works for you, please do not hesitate to reach out, so that we can find a convenient time for you. The interviews could be conducted either in Hungarian or in English.

<https://calendly.com/nikolett-kbk/refugee-education-thesis-interview-1>

A little bit about the research:

The right to quality and accessible education was established in 1948 by the United Nations, although millions of children deprived from it today. The lack of sufficient education damages the school-age refugees and their families' possibilities, and harms societies by enhancing the continuation of conflict. With thematical analysis on distance learning of Ukrainian child refugees, this paper aims to examine distance learning from social workers perspective. The paper focuses on primary and secondary distance education provided for Ukrainian refugees in exile. The inductive study's theoretical framework is based on a learning theory of the digital

age, connectivism. The study intends to contribute to the existing literature on refugee education in times of continuous technological development.

The central questions guiding the research are:

1. What is the role of distance learning for Ukrainian child refugees in Hungary?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities of distance learning for this group?
3. How do social workers in Hungary navigate these challenges and opportunities?

Criteria interviewees are required to meet:

1. A person who is legally employed as a social worker
2. A person who is providing social work services for Ukrainian child refugees residing in Hungary
3. A social worker, who is in contact with clients participating in the Ukrainian blended distance education program.
4. A person, who has at least twelve months of experience working with the affected group.

Again, I am highly appreciating your time and contribution to this research in advance!

Hivatalos interjú felkérés

Szia, köszönöm szépen, hogy időt fordítasz e-meghívólevél elolvasására. Kubik Nikolett vagyok a Malmö-i Egyetem, Nemzetközi Migráció és Etnikai Kapcsolatok szak hallgatója. Ukrán menekült gyermekek oktatásáról szóló szakdolgozatomhoz, Magyarországon az érintett csoporttal dolgozó szociális munkásokkal készítek interjúkat. Szeretnék megkérni, hogy tapasztalatod megosztásával járulj hozzá, hogy alaposabban megérthessük a menekült gyermekek számára elérhető ukrán távoktatást, alapfokú és középfokú szinten. A kutatásom tartalmát az alábbiakban részletezem.

Szeretnék tájékoztatni, hogy semmilyen személyes adatot nem használok fel szakdolgozatomban. Bármilyen kérdést kihagyhatsz, az interjút bármikor szüneteltetheted vagy leállíthatod. Minden dokumentáció és felvétel követi a GDPR és a MAU szabályzatát. Abban az esetben, ha érdekel a kész munka megosztom veled.

Az interjú lebonyolítható személyesen vagy Zoom-híváson keresztül. Az alábbi Calendly linken keresztül lefoglalhatod a kívánt interjú időpontot. Ha nem találsz alkalmas időpontot, kérlek, ne habozz megkeresni, hogy megtalálhassuk a számodra megfelelő időpontot. Az interjú magyar és angol nyelven is folyhat.

<https://calendly.com/nikolett-kbk/refugee-education-thesis-interview-1>

Egy kicsit a kutatásról:

A minőségi és hozzáférhető oktatáshoz való jogot 1948-ban az Egyesült Nemzetek Szervezete, vetette papírra, ugyanakkor ma gyermekek milliói vannak megfosztva ettől a joggól. A megfelelő oktatás hiánya rontja az iskoláskorú menekültek és családjaik lehetőségeit, valamint sérti a társadalmakat is a konfliktusok elősegítésével. Az ukrán menekült gyermekek távoktatásának tematikus elemzésével a szakdolgozatom a távoktatást, szociális munkások szemszögéből kívánja megvizsgálni. A kutatás Magyarországon élő ukrán menekültek számára nyújtott alap- és középfokú távoktatásra összpontosít. Az induktív tanulmány elméleti kerete a

digitális kor tanuláseméletén, a konnektivizmuson alapul. A tanulmány a folyamatos technológiai fejlődés idején kíván hozzájárulni a menekültek oktatásának meglévő irodalmához.

A kutatást központi kérdései a következők:

1. Mi a távoktatás szerepe az ukrán menekült gyermekek számára Magyarországon?
2. Melyek a távoktatás kihívásai és lehetőségei e csoport számára?
3. Hogyan navigálnak a magyarországi szociális munkások ezen kihívások és lehetőségek között?

Az interjúalanyoknak a következő kritériumoknak kell megfelelniük:

1. Olyan személy, aki legalísan szociális munkásként van foglalkoztatva.
2. Olyan személy, aki Magyarországon tartózkodó ukrán menekült gyermekeknek nyújt szociális munkát.
3. Olyan szociális munkás, aki kapcsolatban áll az ukrán távoktatási programban részt vevő ügyfelekkel.
4. Olyan személy, aki legalább hat hónapos tapasztalattal rendelkezik az érintett csoporttal való munkavégzésben.

Ismételten nagyra értékelem az időd és a kutatáshoz való hozzájárulásod!

Interview Guide

1. Are you working as a social worker with Ukrainian child refugees in Hungary?
2. For how long have you been working with the affected group?
3. Do you work for a governmental, intergovernmental organisation (INGO), or non-governmental organisation (NGO)?
4. What is the role of distance education for Ukrainian child refugees in Hungary?
5. What are the challenges and opportunities of distance learning for this group?
6. How do social workers in Hungary navigate these challenges and opportunities?
7. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Mélyinterjú vezérfonal

1. Szociális munkásként, ukrán menekült gyermekekkel foglalkozol Magyarországon?
2. Milyen régóta foglalkozol az említett sérülékeny csoporttal?
3. Állami, INGO, vagy NGO szervezet foglalkoztat?
4. Mi a távoktatás szerepe ukrán menekült gyermekek számára Magyarországon?
5. Milyen nehézségei és előnyei vannak a távoktatásnak az említett csoport esetében?
6. Hogyan navigálnak a magyarországi szociális munkások ezen kihívások és lehetőségek között?
7. Van bármi egyéb hozzáfűznivalód?