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**FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
STUDENTS: THE WAYS OF DETERMINATION AND ASSESSMENT
(THE CASE OF THE ORIPA NAPA UNDER THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE)**

The paper outlines the most basic approaches to determination and assessment of English language proficiency levels taking the case of the MPA students of the ORIPA NAPA under the President of Ukraine. Firstly, it analyses the results of the survey conducted among the PA students of the 1st (Bachelor) and 2nd (Master) levels of education of the Public Administration Faculty of the ORIPA NAPA: self-assessment by the students of their English language skills; results of foreign language entrance testing; test and interview results after completing a foreign language course. Secondly, it reveals the findings of the survey conducted among teaching staff of the Department of Ukrainian and Foreign Languages of the institute.

Key words: *foreign language, level of foreign language proficiency, CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), curricula, syllabus, mastery, teaching of a foreign language.*

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**РІВЕНЬ ВОЛОДІННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЮ МОВОЮ ЗДОБУВАЧІВ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТІ
«ПУБЛІЧНЕ УПРАВЛІННЯ ТА АДМІНІСТРУВАННЯ»: ШЛЯХИ ВИЗНАЧЕННЯ
ТА ОЦІНКИ (НА ПРИКЛАДІ ОРІДУ НАДУ ПРИ ПРЕЗИДЕНТОВІ УКРАЇНИ)**

У статті обґрунтовується необхідність визначення рівня володіння іноземною мовою здобувачів (випускників) закладами вищої освіти відповідно до Загальноєвропейських Рекомендацій з мовної освіти, включення відповідних критеріїв до робочих програм дисциплін. Наводяться результати опитування в ОРІДУ НАДУ при Президентові України: здобувачів вищої освіти спеціальності «Публічне управління та адміністрування» щодо: їхньої самооцінки рівня володіння іноземною мовою; узагальнені результати вхідного тестування з іноземної мови; узагальнені результати тестування та співбесіди після закінчення курсу вивчення іноземної мови; результати визначення індивідуальних потреб в іноземній комунікації та труднощів, що виникають у них в реалізації отриманих знань з професійно орієнтованої іноземної мови, їх очікувань від навчального курсу і переваг. Актуалізується проблема досвідченості науково-педагогічних працівників, які викладають іноземні мови, у сфері державно-управлінських реалій. Проведене дослідження показало: існує проблема достатньо низької результативності навчання іноземним мовам слухачів НАДУ, що більшою мірою, пов'язується із недостатньою кількістю навчальних годин, відведених на іноземні мови у рамках навчальних програм; є нагальна необхідність підвищувати рівень володіння інформацією з державного управління, а також державно-управлінською лексикою серед науково-педагогічних працівників кафедр НАДУ. Висновки дослідження ґрунтуються на тому, що: рівень іноземної мови для всіх випускників потрібно встановлювати у прямій відповідності до шкали Загальноєвропейських рекомендацій з мовної освіти; щодо рівнів володіння пропонується рівень С1 з усіх мовних умінь для університетських викладачів англійської мови, а рівень

B2 для викладачів фахових дисциплін; актуалізується запровадження інтенсивної програми підготовки науково-педагогічних працівників з розробки методичних матеріалів з іноземної мови професійного спрямування; діяльність викладачів іноземної мови орієнтувати не на обов'язкове проведення досліджень та підготовки публікацій, а на майстерність викладання.

Ключові слова: іноземна мова, рівень володіння іноземною мовою, Загальноєвропейські Рекомендації з мовної освіти, освітня програма, робоча програма дисципліни, майстерність, викладання іноземної мови.

Постановка проблеми

Ukraine is a member of the Council of Europe, and CEFR standards (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) should be used in the teaching of foreign languages at all Ukrainian universities. CEFR is the instrument produced within the Council of Europe which plays a decisive role in the teaching of so-called «foreign» languages by promoting methodological innovations and new approaches to designing teaching programmes, notably the development of a communicative approach [3]. Most non-linguistic students enter the universities with A1-B1 levels (CEFR scale) and must reach B2 at the time of graduation. Leading universities in Ukraine are extremely interested in raising their foreign language (English) to be more attractive for prospective students and to promote more international communication and partnership [1, c.117].

Governments in many countries, in response to increased demand for advanced English skills, have published Regulations on English language proficiency levels for students, for English language University teachers and for University lecturers of specialty disciplines identified according to six-level CEFR. To compare: the school graduates of Albania are to obtain A2 level and in Ukraine – B1; the University Graduates (Non-Linguistic Studies) of Albania – C1 and Ukraine – B2; University Graduates (Linguistic Direction) of Albania C2 and Ukraine – not defined; English language teachers at Albania schools – B2 and in Ukraine – C1; Teachers of English at Albania Universities – C1 and in Ukraine – B2; Professional English Teachers, Professional Teachers – in Albania – C2 and in Ukraine – B2. We see that the language requirements for those who study English are higher than for those who teach English.

The variety of curricula used by the universities contains very little information about the years or academic hours for learning English. The syllabuses are based mostly on topics, and the content of these topics depends on the textbooks used. There is no information about the expected levels of training English.

Аналіз останніх досліджень і публікацій

Theoretical principles of foreign language communication have become the focus for many scholars. Various aspects of academic and professional foreign language communication were studied by Yu. Passov (general didactic and methodological provisions for teaching foreign languages); L. Morska, S. Nikolaev (pedagogical aspects of foreign language activity of a person under new conditions of educational process); L. Ivanchenko, P. Obratsov, O. Tarnopolsky, T.Varyanko (training of ESP); A.Hodzeva, I. Secret, O.Zabolotska (formation of communicative skills); R. Grishkova, O. Iskandarov, L. Rudometova, I. Simkov (foreign language training in

professional education), and others. To obtaining and assessment of English language levels proficiency the works by S.Kozak, Yu.Rybinska, O.Zelikovsla and others were devoted.

Виділення невирішених раніше частин загальної проблеми

The problem of Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes training in public administration is being explored somewhat fragmented: the researchers and practitioners examine some specific goals of specific specialties, specific institutions or methods. This approach does not contribute to a holistic understanding of the concept of foreign language communication and determination of the levels of proficiency. It requires a comprehensive analysis of its development in a narrowly focused professionally-oriented environment, taking the case of a definite institution.

Мета

The objective of the paper is to outline the most basic approaches to determination and assessment of English language proficiency levels taking the case of the MPA students of the ORIPA NAPA under the President of Ukraine.

Виклад основного матеріалу

Foreign languages at the Universities (higher education institutions) are taught within the disciplines on specific purposes. These disciplines are aimed to develop students' professional language competences, enabling them to function effectively in culturally diverse academic and professional environments. Being in line with the radical changes introduced in Ukrainian higher education they are triggered by the process of the country's integration into the European Higher Education Area and based on the principles of internationalism, plurilingualism, democracy, equality, and innovation [2, x]. For instance, English for Specific Purposes offers the teacher a new perspective on this important field. The main concern is effective learning and how this can best be achieved in ESP courses [4].

Higher education institutions carry out appropriate learning activities to determine the level of English proficiency of their students (graduates) or describe it in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as C1/C2 or B1/B2 (for different specialties) although criteria for determining proficiency levels are not included into the syllabuses. However, it is necessary, first, to differentiate needs and skills (professional, academic or general), and second, to define the goals, tasks and content according to the degree being obtained. Regarding the academic hours for foreign language training most foreign language courses (aimed at training, for example, a bachelor's degree) can have a 1–2 years break between language courses

which leads to interruptions in the course and reduces the effectiveness of learning.

The PA students of the 1st (Bachelor) and 2nd (Master) levels of education of the Public Administration Faculty of the ORIPA NAPA under the President of Ukraine were offered (following the system of six levels of foreign language proficiency outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and their description – Table 1) to assess their own level of English using the speech activity descriptors «I can do». 123 respondents participated in the study. The results are obtained in the table 1.

Table 1.

Self-assessment by the students of the Faculty of Public Administration of their English language skills

| Level | Number of students | Percent |
|--|--------------------|---------|
| Absence of basic training | 6 | 5 % |
| A1 – Breakthrough | 40 | 32% |
| A2 – Waystage | 53 | 43% |
| B1 – Threshold | 16 | 13% |
| B2 – Vantage | 8 | 7% |
| C1 – Effective Operational Proficiency | – | |

According to Table 1 six respondents (5%) admitted absence of basic training. Partly this may be explained by the fact that some students learned a different foreign language before starting the course. About 40 students said they had a level of English proficiency at A1 (32% of respondents); 53 students made assumptions with A2 level knowledge (43%); 16 students came to the conclusion that they were at B1 (13%); and only 8 of the 123 respondents who participated in the study concluded that their language proficiency, according to the descriptor tables given, corresponds to B2 level (7%).

NAPA training programs in foreign languages for graduates of public administration faculties also include requirements for language proficiency after completion of the course. The syllabuses include tasks related to B1 level requirements. In fact after completing a course in a foreign language the students are not always proficient at this level.

Thus MPA students pass the entrance foreign language test before the training course starts. The general results of this test are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

Generalized results of foreign language entrance testing

| Level | Percent |
|--|---------|
| Absence of basic training | 5% |
| A1 – Breakthrough | 35% |
| A2 – Waystage | 40% |
| B1 – Threshold | 15% |
| B2 – Vantage | 5% |
| C1 – Effective Operational Proficiency | - |
| C2 – Mastery | - |

The practice of introductory testing demonstrates that about 5% of students show the absence of basic training at all, about 35% have a level of training close to A1 (Breakthrough/introductory), about 40% have A2 (Waystage/average), about 15% demonstrate knowledge of B1 level (Threshold/boundary) and only 5% can claim B2 level (Vantage/advanced).

After completing the foreign language course the students are also tested and interviewed. The results are summarized below in Table 3.

Table 3.

Generalized test and interview results after completing a foreign language course

| Level | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| A1 – Breakthrough | 30 % |
| A2 – Waystage | 45 % |
| B1 – Threshold | 18 % |
| B2 – Vantage | 7 % |
| C1 – Effective Operational Proficiency | - |
| C2 – Mastery | - |

It can be stated: about 30% of students remain at A1 level; about 45% demonstrate knowledge close to A2 level; about 18% can claim B1 and only 7% can claim B2. Unfortunately from year to year the situation does not change dramatically.

The survey conducted after completing the study of foreign language disciplines in the form of questionnaires (May-June 2019, 215 MPA students of the 1st year of all forms of study) showed insufficient level of their professionally oriented foreign language training, as indicated by 159 (56.8%) students. 83 (29.6%) respondents rated it as satisfactory; 31 (11.1%) persons recognized that ESP (English for specific purposes) training is provided at a high level. The rest of the respondents did not answer this question – 7 persons (2.5%).

Such a high percentage of «insufficiency» was explained by the small number of study hours spent on foreign language learning. In order to determine the individual needs for foreign language communication of students of «Public management and administering» specialty and to identify the difficulties they have while implementing their knowledge in ESP, their expectations from the training course and advantages they were asked the following questions:

1) Why do you need a foreign language? Answers: for participation in international communicative and other events – 22%; for participation in international projects – 33%; for communication with international partners – 43%; for professional activity – 2%.

2) What do you consider «Professional foreign language» discipline should include? Answers: special vocabulary and terminology of professional activity sphere – 52%; specialty social context (professional communication situations: negotiations, presentations, discussions, etc.) – 48%.

3) What language skills and abilities would you like to improve in order to avoid difficulties in professional communication in a foreign language? Answers: ability to communicate orally in a foreign language on professional topics – 73%; ability to write messages in a foreign

language, ability to use original texts of documents – 21%; ability to understand foreign language message with a professional content and participate in discussions on professional topics – 6%.

4) What language aspects would you like to learn while ESP course? Answers: professional vocabulary – 54%; technical translation – 21%; technical written communication – 20%; grammar – 5%.

According to the results of the survey, it can be concluded that a training course in a professionally oriented foreign language will be effective (both in the formation of linguistic knowledge and in the development of professional skills) if it is based on a balanced combination between thematic blocks of professional content and academic focus. This means that the study of a foreign language, taking into account the context of the specialty, the situations of professional communication and the terminological apparatus of the specialization, should be integrated with blocks aimed at the development of such skills as, for example, writing documents, skills in preparation of a short analytical note, PR, presentation.

The thematic orientation of the «theoretical» block is stipulated by the orientation on the development of additional professional skills of the students. These skills form the basis of general cultural competence, namely: the ability to self-study; the ability to use a foreign language as a means of business communication; the ability to organize project work (both at the stage of project application submission and during project implementation); the ability to take initiative and take responsibility for decision-making; the ability to independently acquire new professional knowledge and skills through information technology (including in new fields of knowledge not directly related to the field of professional activity).

Another problem, as it seems to us, is the lack of experience in the field of public administration realities among foreign language teaching staff. According to the survey among the foreign languages teachers regarding the assessment of their level of knowledge of public administration, the teachers evaluate themselves at the level of 80-85% out of 100. However, according to the results of the conducted survey among the students (for mastery of the public administration topic of the foreign languages teachers), the results are lower: about 65-70%. Therefore, according to the students, there is an urgent need to increase the level of knowledge of public administration, as well as the public administration vocabulary among foreign language teaching staff. This can be done in the form of seminars, pedagogical platforms within the framework of the departments' meetings, advanced training courses, etc.

A survey was conducted among teaching staff of the Department of Ukrainian and Foreign Languages of the ORIPA NAPA under the President of Ukraine (total 9 persons), with the aim of revealing the level of the teachers' awareness of the importance of the problem of readiness of PA students (both Bachelor and Master students) to professionally oriented communication activities as a professionally important quality of a public servant, showed the following:

1. What discipline do you teach in «Public management and administering» specialty? 15% of the teachers failed to give the correct name of the disciplines they teach.

2. Do you consider readiness for professional

communication training to be one of the indicators of a public servant's professional competence? 100% answered «Yes»;

3. Please evaluate the level of readiness of the students of the «Public management and administering» specialty, with whom you work for a professionally oriented communication activity. The teachers evaluated as 75% medium and 25% low.

4. Do you have problems in communicating with the students of the «Public management and administering» specialty? 50% answered «not much»; 50% – «do not occur at all».

5. Do you think that professionally oriented communication training for a student of the «Public management and administering» specialty should take place at all stages of his/her professional training? 80% answered «yes»; 20% – «no»;

6. Do you involve the students into active communication activities during the classes? 100% answered «yes»;

7. Do you feel the need to improve your teaching skills? 80% answered «yes»; 20% – «no».

8. On the question «Please explain, how do you understand the concept of «readiness for professionally oriented communication activities»? the teachers responded: «ability to engage in professional English-language conversations», «ability to summarize texts by specialty», «ability to communicate on topics in a foreign language specialty», «presence of congruence between linguistic and communicative competence», «ability to communicate in professional activity». Noting that they 100% use interactive techniques, the teachers practice the following forms, methods and means of activating speech activity: role-playing games on professional topics, group role-playing, case studies and «question-and-answer» form of communication;

9. Which form of pedagogical skills improvement is the most appropriate for you? The teachers answered:

- meetings for teachers, methodical meetings – 25%;
- participation in conferences, seminars, round tables – 25%;
- advanced training courses – 25%;
- self-study of methodical recommendations – 25%;

10. Do you think that the intensification of interactive teaching methods will help to optimize the professional training of the students of the «Public management and administering» specialty? 50% answered «yes»; 50% – «partially».

11. In percentage terms, please indicate how active you are in using interactive teaching methods for your teaching activity (1 to 100%)? 100% (all teachers) answered positively.

12. Do you seek any advice from the professional disciplines lecturers? 75% answered «from time to time»; 25% – «rarely».

13. How do you evaluate your own expertise in teaching foreign languages in «Public management and administering» specialty (as far as you know public administration subjects)? 75% answered «mediocre»; 25% – «high».

As the result, the conducted study indicates that:

- there is a problem of a rather low effectiveness of teaching foreign languages at NAPA, which is, to a greater extent, attributable to the insufficient number of academic

hours allocated to foreign languages disciplines within the NAPA curricula;

- there is an urgent need to increase the level of mastery of information on public administration, as well as the public-administrative vocabulary among the foreign languages teachers of the NAPA. This can be done in the form of seminars, pedagogical platforms within the framework of the departments' meetings, advanced training courses, etc.

Висновки

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has set the level of English proficiency after the University graduation as the mandatory requirement for all graduates, but under current conditions they are unrealistic and too high for some specialties. The level of English for all graduates should be defined in direct accordance with the CEFR scale: C1 for specialties with high language requirements and B2 for specialties with less linguistic requirements. The education documents should indicate the level of European guidelines for language education achieved by the graduates.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and University Leadership should set the requirements for English proficiency levels at the national level and introduce them as a criterion for appointment or promotion to a higher position.

To increase the capacity of learning materials, it is necessary to develop English language textbooks in cooperation with the subject teachers (those who teach obligatory disciplines on specialty). The textbooks should meet the contemporary requirements to the graduates of the program.

There is a need to review the responsibilities of English language teachers at universities. The University Leadership should release English language teachers from compulsory research and publication (within the requirements of attestation), in favor of fully focusing on teaching. Their professional development is more determined by the improvement of teaching skills and the level of the language than higher academic (research) qualifications. A PhD degree has not helped anyone to become a better teacher yet. All English teachers should take on certain responsibilities within the academic department (curriculum/syllabus development, methodical materials, assessment, etc.). These responsibilities should be rotated every three years so that all teachers can gain experience in these areas over time.

Most teachers are aware of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, but they do not know how it is to be used: to determine curriculum levels or standards or to create tests or other tools verification in achieving these levels.

This will require the Ministry's recommendations, preparation, case studies and dissemination of useful experience.

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