

PROSPECTS AND SETBACKS FOR ENGLISH AS A LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Iryna Ozminska¹

¹*Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department of Public Management and Administration, Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, e-mail: iradzvinka@ukr.net, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2521-8626>*

Abstract. Ukraine's pursuit to become part of the European Union has been long and challenging. Despite Russia's aggression in 2014 and a full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine has been working for years to reform and bring the state apparatus in line with European standards and norms. This includes the anticorruption efforts, striving for transparency in law enforcement and judicial proceedings, and the active involvement of civil society in decision-making at various levels of public administration. The process of training and developing the potential of qualified personnel for public service has undergone significant changes. Taking into account the possible accession of Ukraine to the European Union, the recent draft laws on the status of English as a language of international communication and a language of official documents in public administration, and the need to know it for holding a civil service position regardless of a rank, it is necessary to consider the initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine aimed at improving the proficiency of public officials and factors that can impede their proper implementation.

The purpose of the research is to examine the prospects of initiatives on English as a business language in public administration and to identify the shortcomings to their implementation.

The object of the research is a civil servant as an English language learner.

The methods of the research are observation, comparative analysis, and survey.

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Civil Service" (Zakon Ukrainy, 2015), only those persons who intend to hold a category A position in the civil service, among other professional competencies, are required to have a good command of a foreign language – one of the official languages of the Council of

Europe – and to present a relevant verified certificate with the specified level of foreign language proficiency, or to pass a foreign language test at the Assessment Centre.

Although the law applies to applicants for category A positions, foreign language proficiency is becoming increasingly important in the civil service, especially in the context of Ukraine's European integration aspirations, extensive cooperation with international foundations and organizations, establishing close contacts with foreign partners, and participation in international grant projects.

For English to truly become the language of communication and business practice in Ukraine, it is necessary for the relevant ministries to provide environment for civil servants to learn, improve and put into practice their English language skills on an ongoing basis. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Ukraine has already undertaken many attempts to provide civil servants with the opportunity to develop their English language skills. For instance, 2016 was declared the Year of the English Language, which aimed at promoting the language learning and the integration of Ukraine into the European space of politics, economy, science and education (Ukaz, 2015). The promotion and dissemination of English language skills amongst public officials was supported by national (LingvaSkills, GoGlobal) and international organizations (British Council, which has provided language training to over a thousand officials over the last two decades) through holding training sessions, grammar workshops and providing free access to online learning platforms and massive open online courses (MOOCs) such as Prometheus, EdEra, Coursera, FutureLearn. Within the framework of the recently presented *Future Perfect* initiative, the Ministry of Education and Science and the

Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine launched training courses on the Diia platform and started cooperation with the Promova and Empower Cambridge platforms to provide Ukrainian citizens, including civil servants, with free access to professional learning English (Future Perfect, 2023). The Promova and Empower Cambridge platforms are also recommended as additional supplementary courses for university students. As a result, the efforts to promote English and make quality learning platforms readily available have proved to be effective: according to EF English Proficiency Index, Ukraine's English proficiency score has increased from 435 points in 2014 (EF EPI, 2014) to 530 points in 2023; however, the country is still in the area of moderate fluency (EF EPI, 2023).

However, simply introducing the initiatives is not enough to build a lasting commitment to the learning process, despite the declarations of life-long learning and need for civil servants to professionally develop their skills. Most public administration students are willing to learn the language but they often lack motivation, time and incentives, they become discouraged by their slow progress or struggle because of inaccurate group division where learners with different levels of English study together. Moreover, recent studies conducted among undergraduate and master's students (including acting civil servants) of public administration indicate that at the beginning of their studies their motivation to learn a foreign language is below average, which is mainly due to negative learning experiences in the past and the fact that they have little or no opportunity to use a foreign language outside the classroom, as their job responsibilities are mainly focused on dealing with the requests of Ukrainian citizens who generally speak either Ukrainian or one of the minority languages: Hungarian, Romanian, or Russian.

It is also worth mentioning that the Ministry of Education of Ukraine has tendency towards a constant reduction of academic hours for classroom instruction and guided learning in a foreign language, while leaving the same

number of credits by transferring teaching hours to hours devoted for self-study of the discipline, which in turn has a negative impact on the quality of the learning process and learners tend not to do the assigned individual tasks properly. Thus, at Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas the number of teaching hours for the discipline "Foreign language for professional purposes" for students majoring in 281 Public Management and Administration decreased from 72 academic hours in 2017 to 54 hours per academic year in 2022, while self-study hours increasing from 48 to 66 hrs respectively; classroom hours for "Business English" dropped from 108 hrs in 2019 to 88 hrs per academic year in 2022. As the result, the number of hours for self-study increases proportionally, however, the quality of students' knowledge has not enhanced in spite of increased time available for individual work. In addition, the time for assessing students' individual self-study work, except for homework and lesson preparation, is not included into the teacher's individual curriculum; assessment of this type of work is part of final module test. The practice of reducing classroom hours for guided learning looks rather strange, given the Ministry's aspirations for Ukrainians' English fluency and the desire to make English the language of business communication in public administration.

After examining the initiatives and their shortcomings, we have come to the conclusion that learners – the (future) civil servants, who want or need to learn English are provided with a sufficient number of opportunities and tools to improve their foreign language skills, on the one hand; however, they are limited to practicing them within classroom environment, whether traditional or online. Moreover, learning the language in a self-study mode often becomes a demotivating factor and does not produce desired learning outcomes as it limits social communication and the ability to apply skills in real-life situations.

Keywords: public administration; English; business language.

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