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THE QUALITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITIES IN WAR CONDITIONS

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Abstract

The given article describes the problems affecting the process of education during the war in Ukraine. Higher education, like the entire education field in Ukraine, has also faced real challenges and threats during the war period. It has been revealed that all educational institutions could adapt to distance learning more quickly, but, despite all the advantages, it still carries the risk of worsening students' progress and quality of education. Educators try to imply interactive techniques during foreign language learning, as they are designed to help students develop not only their creative potential but also their ability to think and respond quickly, which can lead to improved communication skills.

Keywords: quality of education, higher education, war period, foreign language learning

Education is one of the most important factors for the development of individuals and societies. It provides knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that enable people to achieve their personal and professional goals and contribute to the social and economic progress of their communities.

In connection with the drastic changes associated with COVID-2019, many institutions of higher education in Ukraine were forced to switch to online education in a fairly short period of time. Universities had to urgently adapt to working in a remote format. The use of modern information tools and technologies helped solve the problem of organizing the learning process in such conditions. So, the challenge was to overcome the poor understanding and acceptance of online learning and new opportunities by teachers and students. To resume education, teachers had to adapt educational disciplines for online learning, create and supplement educational materials, games, and presentations, develop test tasks, etc.

Since February 2022, higher education, like the entire field of education in Ukraine, has been facing real challenges and threats of the war period. The war has resulted in more than 6 million Ukrainians fleeing to neighboring countries. This includes nearly 665,000 students (16% of the total number of enrolled students) and over 25,000 educators (6% of total educators in the country). Another 8 million Ukrainians have been displaced internally [6, p 17].

And therefore, in such tough conditions of wartime for the country, the question arose about ensuring the sustainability of education.

Ukrainian educational institutions have faced the following challenges to date:

1. Organizational – the public sector is unready to reorient the activities of educational institutions in wartime due to limited possibilities for state regulation resulting from decentralization and expanded autonomy.

2. Management – effective mechanisms for managing the education system in crisis situations and established models of management decisions on staff retention are absent.

3. Economic – large-scale losses of both movable and immovable property due to armed combat, the restoration of which will require large financial investments.

4. Personnel – wartime crisis situations clearly demonstrated the organizational confusion and administrative inability of a certain part of educational institutions' authorities to perform their functions in difficult war conditions [2, p. 2647].

The strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training towards the European educational space and beyond (2021-2030) offers an innovative vision of the educational sector in the format of the European educational space. The European educational space should be considered as a system that interconnects all links of education of the EU member states within the framework of lifelong education with such cross-cutting priorities as mobility, skills, competencies and qualifications, modern languages, digitalization, the "square of knowledge": (education, research, innovation, and services to society), a green transition based on European identity and values. The European educational space ensures the synergy of all strategic priorities of the development of the education sector within the framework of lifelong education [10, p. 12].

Despite all these challenges, the acquisition of high-quality education is becoming an increasingly pressing issue at all levels of society. Employers are constantly emphasizing the importance of improving the quality of professional (practical) training for future specialists who can easily adapt to modern market conditions of economic development, can form, and change their own life strategies, and are self-aware.

Foreign language learning is increasingly important in a plurilingual and multicultural social context, which is characterized by a collaborative and dynamic approach at all levels of social and professional spheres. There are two key issues that come to mind: first, what the entire process of learning a foreign language comprises, and second, how to determine achievements during this process. Typically, lexical and grammar competency has been used to define foreign language proficiency. However, with increased attention paid to the study of language and language use in recent years, there has been a shift from language learning viewed as knowledge development to language learning, which has been considered competence that entails knowledge of the norms of language use and abilities of its application in actual communication.

The formation of professional foreign language communicative competence is one of the essential aspects of the professional training of specialists. This process covers a variety of activities directed at the development of practical language skills in a wide range of speech areas connected to personal, public, educational, and chiefly professional spheres, as well as the improvement of previously acquired vocabulary and grammar skills. Various tasks, such as preparing monologues and dialogues, translating specific extracts and texts, annotating professional literature, and so on, that contribute to the formation of foreign language communicative ability can be incorporated into the learning process to attain this goal [12, p.11].

In 2012, the United Nations listed quality education as one of its Sustainable Development Goals for the first time. Quality education is defined as one that focuses on the learner to prepare them for life, not just for assessments. The review of scientific works has revealed that the issues connected with improving the quality of education have always been the object of research. Modern domestic and foreign authors (V.Andrushchenko, V.Astakhova, D.Dzvinchuk, V.Kremen, M.Kysil, O.Lokshyna, O.Nikolayenko, V.Ognevyuk, V.Shynkaruk, O.Velychko, A.Barrett, C.Beeby, R.Chawla-Duggan, W.Heneveld, J.Lowe, J.Nikel, D.Simmons, E.Ukpo, R.White and others) have studied the quality of education in various aspects: social, philosophical, educational, pedagogical, managerial, and cultural. Following scholars' findings, the quality of education is considered a complex philosophical, socio-pedagogical, managerial, and economic-scientific category that combines a set of properties of education that determine its ability to satisfy the relevant needs of an individual in society.

The state of Ukraine's system of education in the war conditions has been highlighted in the works of native researchers T.Golub, Y.Lavrysh, O.Lokshyna, I.Lytovchenko, V.Lukianenko, Y.Nazarenko, I.Kogut, T.Zheriobkina, as well as in the works of foreign scientists T.Brück, D.Braber, N.Haddad, P.Koyiet, S.Posch, K.Shaw, S. Santos etc.

Also, the literature overview has shown that Ukrainian researchers have made significant advancements in investigating methods, types, and applications of interactive learning methods that

contribute to the quality of students' foreign languages education. Thus, interactive methods and technologies, their types, and classification were covered in the works of G.Bondar, O.Horbaniova, N.Kolomiets, L.Konoplianyk, A.Paladieva, V.Pavlyuk, V.Shevchuk, M.Teslenko, G.Voloshyna, and others.

In his research, V.Zaichuk singles out the following main parameters of the quality of higher education: compliance of students' knowledge with state educational standards; the quality of the educational process, which ensures the level of personal development; the dynamics of individual achievements in self-determination, self-development, and self-realization; educational and methodological support of the training process; positive learning motivation; readiness for cognitive activity. The quality of management of educational programs should be aimed at the main goal of the education system, which is to provide conditions for the comprehensive development of students and the education of citizens in a democratic society [4, 62].

V.Lisovyy, V.Kapustnyk, I.Fomina et al. defining the concept of "quality of higher education" believe that it should be based on three main approaches that are reflected in modern socio-philosophical thought: objectivist, relativist, and competence. The first approach analyses the quality of higher education based on the parameters of the higher education system (professional level of teachers, level of material and technical support, level of knowledge of students at the initial stage of education, etc.) and the initial parameters (rating of graduates, employment opportunities, etc.). The relativistic approach is based on the achievement of learning goals – to what extent the level of knowledge of students' achievements corresponds to the planned result in the form of the requirements of educational standards. The competence approach is focused on improving the quality of the educational process in the current period. When evaluating the quality of higher education, students' creative cognitive activity and the level of competencies formed in them are considered [9, p.6].

According to these approaches, three elements can be distinguished in the quality system of higher education: the quality of the potential of higher education, the quality of the process of higher education, and the quality of the result of higher education.

The war in Ukraine made it clear that the stresses of wartime affect not only people in the war zone or in the occupation but also people in the rear, abroad. Constant overwork, anxiety, and long-term stress during martial law exhaust the body, harm physical well-being, and can become a reason for depression in both teachers and students, which in turn affects the quality of the educational process and the quality of the knowledge and skills acquired by students in higher education. The psychological state of both educators and students should be considered when talking about the quality of education.

V.Lazarenko and N.Sanina, studying the psychological state of students of a higher education institution during the war, conducted a questionnaire for 75 students at Dnipro State Medical University. It was revealed that "When assessing the level of anxiety, 49.3% of respondents felt strong anxiety, 26.7% rather felt anxiety, 17.3% both felt it and did not feel it, and 6.7% did not feel anxiety at all. When assessing concentration in studies over the past 4 weeks, 78.7% of respondents indicated that concentration decreased, 13.7% did not change, and 8% increased. Even though many respondents have decreased interest and concentration in studies, 65.3% of respondents are satisfied with the quality of teaching subjects in wartime conditions, and 58.7% consider it appropriate to conduct training during wartime [8, 240].

Every day, all the participants of the education process must overcome the challenges of war: forced breaks during classes, switching to the remote or mixed format of studies, air raid warnings, and power blackouts. The full-scale war has made access to education worse and existing education inequalities deeper, it has negatively affected the quality of the education process and the student's progress and has impacted the mental and emotional state of students and teachers.

Undoubtedly, the ongoing war has resulted in learning limitations. Due to bombings, air raid warnings, threats of artillery attacks, blackouts, interrupted internet access, and other factors, students are forced to miss both online and offline classes. Teachers attempt to follow the curriculum despite the challenging working conditions. To achieve this, they integrate themes, assign tasks for individual

learning, and employ non-synchronous teaching techniques, such as providing video recordings of lectures and tutorials on online platforms.

Therefore, higher education institutions frequently implement a blended approach to the educational process, i.e., lectures are typically offered online while seminars and workshops are held in the classroom.

D.Koroviy and N.Lazarenko believe that blended learning is a promising alternative in education due to its advantages over the traditional approach. They consider blended education as a form of organization of knowledge acquisition that implies both face-to-face and electronic education to achieve the best result and meet the students' needs; it is a mix of approaches to the educational organization, a process that expands opportunities and compensates for the shortcomings of individual education systems. [7, p.166].

Teaching a foreign language in the format of blended learning brings significant benefits because teachers receive a tool with great potential. The teacher can plan the work so that students have the opportunity to practice: listening to the necessary audio material, watching an educational video, answering questions, and practicing speaking skills. Thanks to various software applications, students have the opportunity to study at any convenient time and quickly find and process educational material.

Currently, all university teachers have mastered the distance learning method and developed online courses in their subjects on the platform Moodle. This policy should be further expanded and deepened by building an ecosystem of digital education; the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in high educational institutions, which is currently actively involved in leading countries to improve the quality of education. Education with the involvement of AI allows to personalize learning, considering the individuality of a student, and to deepen its content [3, p.56].

The digitalization of various parts of global civilization will continue to accelerate, and we must be prepared. Today, online training is organized in Ukraine through a variety of platforms, such as Zoom, Teams, Classroom, Google Meet, and others. At the same time, the community of scholars in Ukraine has polarized opinions on this topic. Most educators believe that distance learning is a potential way to advance modern education, pointing to a few advantages (possibilities for students to organize their study at any time and in any place; access to materials from electronic libraries; increasing the efficiency of students' independent work, etc.). And, on the contrary, several problems associated with the organization of this type of schooling have been underlined by other researchers. Some of these include a lack of live communication between the teacher and students that decreases the efficiency of knowledge exchange; a considerable professional workload for teachers; insufficient bandwidth of the Internet connection, which primarily affects students from remote settlements; and, finally, a complicated verification of students and their independence in fulfilling their home assignments and, consequently, the problem of evaluation of their works.

It is extremely important to move from passive to active learning nowadays, during which significant emphasis is placed on improving students' practical skills in professional training. Moreover, using a student-centered approach to teaching will allow each student to participate in various learning activities. Foreign language teachers are constantly searching for ways to boost students' involvement in the study process to increase their motivation to learn languages. The application of interactive technologies in foreign language learning is recognized as one of the most effective approaches for achieving these goals. It helps to develop students' creativity and imagination, as well as their cognitive interest in studying foreign languages and improving their conversational abilities.

Motivated learners are every teacher's dream – they are willing to work hard, add their own goals to those of the classroom, focus their attention on the tasks at hand, persevere through challenges, do not need continuous encouragement, and may even stimulate others in the classroom, promoting collaborative learning. However, we all know that the motivation behind our learners' learning varies widely, ebbs, and flows over the course of the year (or even during a single classroom activity), and stems from various sources, internal to the learner, external, or both. As teachers, we can generally see who is motivated and who is not, and often we may wonder how or even if we can harness the motivation of some and spread it out to others. Tapping into motivation is crucial for

language teachers because we know that motivation is one of the key factors driving language learning success [1, 49].

When a student is motivated professionally, his cognitive activity is inclusive and persistent. A student has a desire to learn since it gives him a feeling of satisfaction and encourages him to work. Students take initiative and develop a creative, intellectual atmosphere around them. They demonstrate the desire for successful, fruitful academic and professional achievements. Students study more effectively when they are inspired by a sense of self-affirmation and a desire to demonstrate their actual and potential accomplishments.

Interactive methods require active participation from both students and teachers, as well as various forms and tools of learning. They also encourage students to work independently and think critically. Some examples of interactive methods of teaching foreign languages are presentation, role play, discussion, brainstorming, contest, project, simulation, web-quest, and so on.

According to O.Pometun and L.Pyrozhenko, interactive technologies can be divided into four groups, depending on the purpose of the lesson and the forms of organization of students' learning activities [11, 27]:

1) interactive technologies of cooperative learning (work in pairs, threes, carousel, work in small groups, aquarium, etc.);

2) interactive technologies of collective-group learning (microphone, unfinished sentences, brainstorming, openwork saw, etc.);

3) technologies of situational modelling (simulation games, role-play, dramatization, etc.);

4) technologies for processing discussion questions (PRESS method, position loans, case method, discussion, etc.)

Interactive technologies can be characterized by the presence of dialogue, the exchange of opinions, and arguments for and against the disputable matter. Any lesson based on discussion is effective if the participants have basic knowledge of the issue and if a teacher has planned the main stages and key points in advance. During the planning stage, a teacher chooses and formulates an issue, and plans ways of stimulating and monitoring participants' activity. He must prepare the necessary equipment to record students' ideas. When the discussion starts, the teacher performs as an intermediary. It is very important to perceive different points of view on a particular problem, to have his own opinion, and to be able to make conclusions and evaluate achievements. You can use various techniques of introducing the topic to the audience: describe a problematic situation, put problem questions, show a video, role-play the situation, presenting a few opinions on an issue. A discussion should comprise different points of view which in the end evolve the decision. [3, p.55]

The teachers of the foreign languages department at Ternopil National Pedagogical University try to take every opportunity and involve students in the learning process through the usage of interactive techniques like role-playing and business simulations, problem-solving, brainstorming, etc. Each class begins with a discussion of a topic-related problem. Students express their opinions and share ideas with one another and the teacher. They communicate in pairs, small groups, and with the whole class throughout the lesson. Usually, students are encouraged to prepare a presentation or project that serves as the final vision of a unit.

Information and communication technologies, which are used to optimize the process of education, additionally provide opportunities for interactive communication among participants. During foreign language teaching, the authors successfully use the Ternopil National Pedagogical University's virtual learning environment, the MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) platform, which contains electronic textbooks, interactive teaching aids, crossword puzzles and vocabulary memorization games, grammar simulators, presentations, reference and information sources, audio and video files, control tests, and so on. It is effective to use the Google Meet application and the Zoom video communication platform to develop communication skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) because they allow you to divide students into subgroups to practice dialogues or monologue statements, use a 'virtual' blackboard, and make presentations.

In addition, teachers also make considerable use of Google Cloud services, particularly Google Chat, Google Drive, and Google Docs, as well as mobile applications and social networks. It is essential to provide various formats and new methods to communicate and collaborate with students. The ability to select and implement technology that fully corresponds to the topic and substance of the lesson not only contributes to the effectiveness of the organization of the learning process but also has a significant effect on students' motivation to learn a foreign language.

Conclusions. The war has presented many serious challenges to the whole system of education in Ukraine. Solving most of the current problems of higher education and creating conditions for its development is possible only after the end of the war. At the same time, the experience of organizing the education process during the war in Ukraine has revealed that all educational institutions could adapt to distant learning more quickly. However, distance education still carries the risk of worsening students' progress and their quality of education, educators try to imply all possible interactive techniques, as the interactive methods are centered on the student. They are designed to help students develop their creative potential and ability to think and respond quickly, which can lead to improved communication skills. As a result, we can assume that interactive approaches are among the most advanced strategies for efficiently building foreign language communicative skills.

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