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- Zablotska L.M., Chernii L.V., Meleshchenko V.O.** 701  
*INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION*
- Акімова О.В., Сапогов М.В. Ганчук Я.А.** 714  
*ЦІННІСНІ ЗАСАДИ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ ВЧИТЕЛІВ ІСТОРІЇ*
- Алексеева С.В.** 725  
*РОЗВИТОК ЯКОСТІ ОСВІТИ В УКРАЇНІ: ЧИННИКИ ВПЛИВУ МІЖНАРОДНИХ ТА НАЦІОНАЛЬНИХ МОНІТОРИНГІВ*
- Амеліна С.М., Назаров Б.О.** 735  
*ІНТЕРАКТИВНІ ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ ФОРМУВАННЯ SOFT SKILLS У МАЙБУТНІХ ФІЛОЛОГІВ*
- Андросенко А.О.** 745  
*ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ШТУЧНОГО ІНТЕЛЕКТУ У ФАХОВІЙ ПІДГОТОВЦІ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ТЕХНОЛОГІЙ*
- Атамась О.А., Гаценко В.П., Гріцишина Ж.М.** 757  
*КЛАСИЧНА АЕРОБІКА ЯК ОСВІТНІЙ КОМПОНЕНТ У СИСТЕМІ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ПІДГОТОВКИ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ФІЗИЧНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ*
- Бабюк С.М., Марчук Д.В.** 770  
*УДОСКОНАЛЕННЯ МЕТОДИКИ НАВЧАННЯ ГІМНАСТИЧНИМ ВПРАВАМ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ФІЗИЧНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ*
- Бабюк Т.Й., Каньоса Н.Г., Карук І.В., Стахова І.А.** 781  
*ЕКОЛОГІЧНА ОСВІТА ДІТЕЙ СТАРШОГО ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ТА МОЛОДШОГО ШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ: ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ ДОСВІД, ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ, НАСТУПНІСТЬ ТА РЕГІОНАЛЬНИЙ ВИМІР*
- Балла Л.В.** 794  
*ВИХОВАННЯ ДУХОВНО-МОРАЛЬНИХ ЦІННОСТЕЙ ДІТЕЙ СТАРШОГО ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ ЗАСОБАМИ ХУДОЖНІХ ТВОРІВ ЯК ПРОБЛЕМА ОСВІТИ СТАЛОГО РОЗВИТКУ*
- Биков А.В.** 806  
*МОДЕЛЮВАННЯ ОСВІТНЬОГО СЕРЕДОВИЩА ЗВО В УМОВАХ ЦИФРОВІЗАЦІЇ*



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## INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Abstract.** This article explores practical approaches to integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into university foreign language instruction. It focuses on teaching methods, task design, and strategies for enhancing student awareness and motivation. As higher education increasingly acknowledges its role in advancing sustainable development, foreign language classrooms are emerging as valuable, though still underexplored, spaces for sustainability-oriented learning. The study is based in the Ukrainian educational context, where the ongoing war has brought issues of peace, justice, inequality, and access to quality education into sharp, immediate focus. For many Ukrainian university students, the themes represented by the SDGs are not abstract global concerns but immediate realities that shape their everyday experiences, making this context particularly relevant for SDG-integrated instruction. The study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. Academic sources in the fields of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) were systematically reviewed and analysed. In addition, a pilot survey was conducted with 66 first- and second-year students of the Faculty of Geography of Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University (TNPU). The findings demonstrate that active, student-centred methods, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Project-Based Learning (PBL), discussions, and CLIL, effectively support the integration of the SDGs into language teaching. The article provides practical examples of reading, writing, and speaking tasks aligned with specific SDGs, along with a framework for instructional planning. Survey results suggest that integrating the SDGs into language instruction enhances students' motivation, positively affects their



satisfaction, and increases their perception of the relevance of English language learning. The article concludes by outlining directions for future empirical research, with particular attention to the wartime educational context in Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Foreign Language Teaching (FLT), higher education, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Ukraine, teaching methods, student motivation.

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## ІНОЗЕМНІ МОВИ ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ ДОСЯГНЕННЯ ЦІЛЕЙ СТАЛОГО РОЗВИТКУ У ПРОФЕСІЙНІЙ ПІДГОТОВЦІ СТУДЕНТІВ

**Анотація.** У даній статті досліджуються практичні шляхи інтеграції Цілей Сталого Розвитку (ЦСР) у процес навчання іноземних мов в університетах. Дослідження зосереджено на трьох ключових сферах: методах викладання, розробці завдань та стратегіях підвищення обізнаності та мотивації студентів. Воно особливо актуальне для українського контексту, де тривала війна зробила такі ЦСР, як якісна освіта (ЦСР 4), мир і справедливість (ЦСР 16) та зменшення нерівності (ЦСР 10), частиною повсякденного життя студентів.

У дослідженні використовується якісний, описово-аналітичний підхід. Це допомогло проаналізувати та узагальнити академічні джерела з викладання іноземних мов, інтегрованого навчання змісту та мови (CLIL) та освіти для сталого розвитку. Також було проведено пілотне опитування серед 66 студентів першого та другого курсів географічного факультету Тернопільського національного педагогічного університету імені Володимира Гнатюка (ТНПУ) для збору попередніх даних щодо мотивації та задоволеності студентів інтегрованим навчанням з ЦСР.

У статті показано, що активні, орієнтовані на студента методи, такі як викладання мови на основі завдань, проектне навчання, дискусії та CLIL, ефективно підтримують інтеграцію ЦСР. Дослідження містить приклади завдань з читання, письма та говоріння, що стосуються конкретних Цілей сталого розвитку. Результати пілотного опитування показують, що інтеграція ЦСР у



процес вивчення іноземних мов сприяє позитивному ставленню до навчання та підвищує мотиваційний потенціал студентів. Стаття визначає перспективні напрями подальших емпіричних досліджень, зокрема в умовах воєнного часу в Україні.

**Ключові слова:** Цілі сталого розвитку (ЦСР), викладання іноземних мов, вища освіта, викладання англійської мови, освіта для сталого розвитку, Україна, методи навчання, мотивація студентів.

**Introduction.** The world today continues to face serious challenges. Climate change, social inequality, and risks to peace and security are among the most pressing issues of our time. To address them, the international community has renewed its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, first adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set 17 key priorities for building a better future, addressing pressing global issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. Achieving them demands coordinated action from governments, communities, and institutions.

Universities as hubs of learning and innovation play a vital role in shaping the future generation. Their responsibility is not only to train competent professionals but also to develop globally-minded and socially responsible individuals. In this regard, foreign language education at university should not only aim to develop future specialists' communicative competence but also provide a rich platform for exploring values, perspectives, and global issues.

This challenge feels especially urgent in Ukraine. Since February 2022, Ukrainian society has been living through the conditions of full-scale war, which has profoundly affected the higher education system by disrupting academic routines, displacing both students and faculty, and accelerating the transition to distance and blended learning formats. In the current context, the SDGs have become especially important. Peace and justice (SDG 16), quality education (SDG 4), and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) are closely linked to the need for resilient higher education institutions. These goals are not distant ideals; they are everyday realities for Ukrainian students. At the university level, English language teaching plays a key role. It connects global perspectives with local experiences, turning the classroom into a space for meaningful and values-based learning. This integration highlights both the educational value of the SDGs and their practical relevance within higher education.

Despite growing international interest in Education for Sustainable Development and its integration into foreign language instruction, significant research gaps remain in the Ukrainian academic context. While policymakers have highlighted the importance of Education for Sustainable Development in higher education, there remains limited empirically grounded and discipline-specific research on how SDG themes can be practically integrated into foreign language instruction. Scholars have given limited attention to teaching methods and classroom practices that support SDG-focused foreign language learning. They have also overlooked tasks that build students'



awareness and motivation regarding sustainability, as well as the ways wartime conditions in Ukraine influence these processes.

**The aim of this article** is to explore practical approaches to embedding SDG content into university English language instruction, with particular attention to teaching methods, task design, and strategies for raising student awareness and motivation. The study seeks to add new perspectives to academic discussion and to offer English-language instructors in Ukraine clear, research-based ideas for integrating sustainability themes into their courses.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** Global policy frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [1] and UNESCO's Education 2030 Incheon Declaration [2, 3], place education at the centre of efforts to achieve the SDGs. They call on universities to prepare graduates who understand global challenges and feel responsible for addressing them. Researchers have examined various ways universities are trying to embed sustainability into teaching and institutional practice. Active learning approaches, such as project-based learning, have been identified as particularly effective [4, 5].

Foreign language education is increasingly recognized as a natural space for integrating sustainability, as it not only develops communication skills but also encourages intercultural awareness and critical reflection on global challenges. Scholars argue that English as a Lingua Franca is well-suited to fostering global citizenship alongside language learning (Bekteshi & Xhaferi, 2020; Yu, Guo & Fu, 2024; Vasiljevic, 2025). Other researchers, such as Nazirova [9] and Karimova [10], provide practical examples of embedding SDG content into everyday lessons. Teaching methods are central to this process, with task-based and project-based approaches shown to improve both language outcomes and student motivation [11].

In Ukraine, this area of research is still developing. Chaikovska & Levchyk [12, 13] and Chaikovska et al. (2024) have explored integrating the SDGs into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, while Korolchuk and Voitenko [15] and Stukalo and Lytvyn [16] offer broader perspectives on sustainability in Ukrainian higher education. Tsos and Makaruk [17] highlight the specific pressures of wartime on academic life. While interest in the field is still growing, empirical, classroom-based research remains limited, particularly in foreign language teaching, a gap this article seeks to address.

**Methodology.** This study uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, grounded in a review of the academic literature across three related fields: foreign language teaching, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and Education for Sustainable Development. Sources were reviewed from major academic databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus) using keywords related to SDGs, foreign language teaching, CLIL, and task-based approaches. Relevant pedagogical frameworks were analysed and adapted to the Ukrainian university context, with particular emphasis on TBLT as a practical model for SDG-focused instruction.

To complement the literature review, a pilot survey was conducted among first- and second-year students of the Geography Faculty at Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk



National Pedagogical University (TNPU), Ukraine. The survey involved 66 participants: 32 first-year students (24 male, 8 female) and 34 second-year students (24 male, 10 female). It consisted of four multiple-choice questions on student motivation, satisfaction with SDG-integrated lessons, perceived relevance of SDG topics, and willingness to continue with this approach. Responses were analyzed descriptively, as the findings were treated as preliminary and indicative.

**The main research findings** are presented across four themes: the SDGs and foreign language education; teaching methods; task design; and strategies for raising student awareness and motivation.

### ***1. The SDGs and English Language Education***

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, sets out 17 goals to address the world's most urgent challenges. These range from ending poverty and reducing inequality to protecting the environment and promoting peace and justice. The goals are closely connected: progress in one area often supports progress in others. Together, they form a shared vision for a more just and sustainable world by 2030.

Among the 17 goals, SDG 4 on Quality Education is especially relevant to higher education. It calls for inclusive and equitable learning opportunities and encourages the development of knowledge and skills that support sustainable development, including global citizenship and critical thinking.

For university English language instructors, SDG 4 offers both guidance and responsibility. It frames the classroom not only as a place to build communication skills but also as a space where students can grow into informed, reflective, and socially responsible individuals.

This connection between language learning and sustainability education is not coincidental. As a global language, English enables students to participate in international conversations about climate change, inequality, human rights, and peace. It also provides authentic materials, such as news articles, reports, speeches, and documentaries, that illustrate SDG themes across different contexts. Working with these topics in English encourages students to think critically, share opinions, and engage with diverse perspectives. For these reasons, the university English classroom is a natural setting for integrating SDG content.

### ***2. Teaching Methods for SDG Integration in University English Classrooms***

Choosing the right teaching methods is essential for meaningful integration of the SDGs. When sustainability topics are taught in a passive, teacher-centred way, students often engage only at the surface level. In contrast, active and student-centred methods help learners think more deeply and connect more genuinely with global issues [4]. Approaches such as debates, project-based learning, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks are especially effective for bringing the UN SDGs into university English language classes. These methods not only build language skills but also encourage students to reflect on real-world challenges and explore possible solutions.



TBLT is one of the most practical frameworks for this purpose. In TBLT, students complete meaningful, real-world tasks that require them to use language purposefully. When tasks are designed to correspond to SDG themes, such as writing a proposal to reduce food waste or preparing a short presentation on gender equality, students develop language skills and, at the same time, gain awareness of global challenges. This combined focus makes TBLT especially valuable for instructors who want to integrate sustainability while still meeting language learning objectives [11].

Project-based learning (PBL) takes this idea further by engaging students in extended, collaborative projects over a longer period. PBL encourages students to research real problems, think critically, and produce meaningful outcomes, all of which align naturally with the spirit of the SDGs [5]. In an English language course, a PBL project might involve students investigating a local sustainability issue, gathering information in English, and presenting their findings to the group. Such projects build language skills while also developing a sense of civic agency and responsibility.

Discussion and debate are also powerful tools for SDG-focused language teaching. These formats give students the opportunity to express opinions, listen to others, and practise argumentation. Topics such as climate change, justice, access to education, and the impact of war on communities are not only relevant to the SDGs but also personally meaningful to many Ukrainian students. When students feel that a topic genuinely matters to them, they are more likely to engage deeply and communicate authentically [6, 7].

CLIL offers a broader framework that can incorporate all of the above. CLIL involves teaching subject matter through a foreign language. In this case, sustainability topics are introduced and explored in the target language. Research shows that this approach supports both language development and subject learning simultaneously [8]. For English language instructors in Ukraine, CLIL offers a flexible, well-researched model for integrating SDG content into the classroom in a structured and principled way.

### ***3. Designing SDG-Focused Tasks for the Foreign Language Classroom***

Effective task design is at the heart of successful SDG integration. A well-designed task does more than practise language. It encourages students to think, reflect, and engage with ideas that matter. When designing SDG-focused tasks, instructors should keep a few core principles in mind: tasks should be meaningful and connected to real-world issues, remain achievable within the boundaries set by the course structure, and they should allow students to use language creatively and purposefully, rather than simply reproducing fixed phrases or structures [11, 10].

Reading and discussion tasks are a natural starting point. Authentic texts, such as news articles, UN reports, or opinion pieces on sustainability topics, expose students to real English while also introducing SDG themes in context. After reading, students can discuss the main ideas, share their reactions, or compare the situation described in the text with their own national or local experience. A short article about the global refugee crisis, for example, can spark a rich discussion of SDG 16 (Peace and Justice)



that feels immediate and relevant to students across the world. Nazirova [9] and Karimova [10] both highlight the value of using authentic materials to make SDG content accessible and engaging for language learners.

Writing tasks offer another productive avenue. Students can be asked to write opinion essays on sustainability issues, draft letters to local authorities proposing solutions to environmental problems, or produce short reports on a specific SDG and its relevance to their own country or community. These genres are not only useful for developing academic writing skills but also encourage students to take a position, support their arguments with evidence, and reflect on their role as citizens. Korolchuk and Voitenko [15] suggest that connecting writing tasks to professional and civic contexts increases student motivation and gives language practice a clear sense of purpose.

Speaking tasks bring SDG content to life in the classroom. Presentations, debates, and role-plays create opportunities for meaningful communication on sustainability themes. Role-plays, such as simulating a UN committee meeting or a community consultation on a local environmental issue, add an element of creativity and can make abstract global goals feel more concrete and human [6, 8].

Table 1 below, developed by the authors, provides an overview of how different task types can be matched to specific SDGs, offering instructors a practical reference point for lesson planning.

*Table 1*

*Task Types and Their Alignment with Selected SDGs*

<b>Task Type</b>	<b>SDG(s) Addressed</b>	<b>Example Activity</b>	<b>Language Skills Developed</b>
Reading & Discussion	SDG 4 (Quality Education) SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)	Read a UN report on education access; discuss disparities in your country	Reading comprehension, speaking, and critical thinking
Opinion Essay	SDG 13 (Climate Action) SDG 15 (Life on Land)	Write an essay arguing for or against a proposed climate policy	Academic writing, argumentation, vocabulary
Proposal Writing	SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities) SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)	Draft a proposal to reduce waste on your university campus	Formal writing, persuasion, civic literacy



Task Type	SDG(s) Addressed	Example Activity	Language Skills Developed
Presentation	SDG 4 (Quality Education) SDG 8 (Decent Work)	Prepare and deliver a 5-minute presentation on youth unemployment in Ukraine	Speaking, research skills, and academic vocabulary
Debate	SDG 16 (Peace & Justice) SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)	Debate: Should economic development take priority over environmental protection?	Argumentation, listening, and turn-taking
Role Play / Simulation	SDG 16 (Peace & Justice) SDG 17 (Partnerships)	Simulate a UN committee session on refugee rights	Interactive communication, negotiation language
Project-Based Learning	Multiple SDGs (student-chosen)	Research a local sustainability issue and present findings to the group	All four skills, collaborative language use

Task design should also be sensitive to the specific circumstances of students and institutions. In contexts where distance or blended learning is common, or where students face significant personal or social pressures, tasks that are flexible, clearly structured, and not overly resource-intensive are more likely to succeed. Importantly, SDG topics, particularly those related to peace, justice, and resilience, can provide students with a meaningful framework for making sense of their own experiences, turning challenging circumstances into a source of genuine engagement rather than an obstacle to learning [17].

#### ***4. Fostering Student Awareness and Motivation Through SDG-Focused Learning***

Integrating SDG content into English language teaching is not only about choosing the right methods or designing effective tasks. It also requires attention to how students feel about the topics they are studying. Awareness and motivation are closely linked: students who understand why sustainability matters are more likely to engage with it genuinely, and students who feel personally connected to a topic are more likely to develop deeper awareness over time [7].

To gather preliminary evidence on these dynamics, a pilot survey was conducted among 66 first- and second-year students of the Geography Faculty at TNPU. Students were asked four closed questions: their motivation for engaging with SDG-related content in English, their overall satisfaction with SDG-integrated lessons, whether they



perceived SDG topics as relevant to real life, and whether they wished to see more such content in their courses. Responses were collected on a four-point scale (e.g., very motivated/motivated/neutral/not motivated). The authors present the results in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

***Pilot Survey Results: Student Motivation and Satisfaction (n=66)***

Survey Question	Year 1 (n=32)	Year 2 (n=34)
How motivated did you feel when SDG topics were used in English class?	Very motivated: 12 (37.5%), Motivated: 14 (43.8%), Neutral: 5 (15.6%), Not motivated: 1 (3.1%)	Very motivated: 15 (44.1%) Motivated: 15 (44.1%) Neutral: 4 (11.8%) Not motivated: 0 (0%)
How satisfied were you overall with SDG-integrated English lessons?	Very satisfied: 10 (31.3%) Satisfied: 16 (50.0%) Neutral: 5 (15.6%) Dissatisfied: 1 (3.1%)	Very satisfied: 14 (41.2%) Satisfied: 16 (47.1%) Neutral: 4 (11.8%) Dissatisfied: 0 (0%)
Did you feel that SDG topics made English learning more relevant to real life?	Strongly agree: 11 (34.4%) Agree: 15 (46.9%) Uncertain: 5 (15.6%) Disagree: 1 (3.1%)	Strongly agree: 14 (41.2%) Agree: 17 (50.0%) Uncertain: 3 (8.8%) Disagree: 0 (0%)
Would you like more SDG-related content in your English lessons?	Yes: 23 (71.9%), Unsure: 7 (21.9%), No: 2 (6.3%)	Yes: 27 (79.4%), Unsure: 6 (17.6%), No: 1 (2.9%)

The survey results suggest a generally positive response to SDG-integrated English language teaching across both year groups. The large majority of students in both cohorts reported feeling motivated or very motivated when SDG topics were used in class, and most expressed satisfaction with this approach. Second-year students showed slightly higher levels of motivation and satisfaction, which may reflect greater familiarity with sustainability themes or a more developed capacity for critical engagement. Most students across both years agreed that SDG topics made their English learning feel more relevant to real life, and a substantial majority indicated that they would welcome more SDG-related content in future lessons. These preliminary findings, while not statistically representative, consistently support the value of SDG integration and reinforce the need for further empirical research in this area.



Ukrainian university students experience the SDGs in a way that most students worldwide do not. Issues like displacement, inequality, limited access to education, and the ongoing struggle for peace are things many of them live through personally, not just read about in textbooks. This gives English language teachers a real advantage. When SDG topics are introduced in the classroom in ways that connect global goals to what students already know and feel, learning becomes more personal and relevant. As a result, students are more likely to engage with the material seriously and find genuine meaning in it [13]. A discussion about SDG 4 and access to quality education, for example, can lead to reflection on how war has affected Ukrainian universities and what quality education might look like in the future.

Connecting the global to the local is therefore one of the most effective strategies for building student awareness. Instructors can encourage students to examine international SDG frameworks and ask how they apply specifically to Ukraine. This kind of critical localisation helps students see themselves not merely as observers of global issues but as participants in them [18, 8]. It also makes English language learning feel more relevant, as students are using the language to explore questions that genuinely matter to them.

The role of the teacher should not be underestimated here. Research indicates that instructors who show genuine curiosity and openness and demonstrate a personal commitment to sustainability values tend to foster a similar attitude in their students [4]. When teachers come to SDG topics with real questions rather than predetermined answers, students are more likely to feel motivated and engaged. This approach treats students as partners in exploring ideas, rather than as passive listeners who simply absorb what they are told.

Building learner autonomy is also an important factor in keeping students motivated over time. When students are given some degree of choice, whether in the topics they explore, the tasks they complete, or the SDGs they focus on, they tend to feel a stronger sense of ownership over their own learning [10, 9]. Reflective activities such as learning journals, self-assessment tasks, or end-of-unit discussions can help students notice their own progress and see how their language learning connects to their growth as aware and responsible citizens. In the Ukrainian context, where many students are dealing with significant personal and social difficulties, having some control over their learning and feeling that it serves a real purpose becomes particularly meaningful.

**Conclusions.** This study explored the potential of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into university English language teaching, focusing on methodology, task design, and learner motivation. The findings show that SDG content enriches language learning by providing meaningful contexts for communication, fostering critical thinking, and cultivating civic awareness. Student-centred approaches such as TBLT, project-based learning, and CLIL proved most effective, and task design should emphasise relevance and purposeful language use. Survey data from TNPU students indicate that SDG-integrated lessons enhance motivation and the perceived



value of English learning, particularly in the wartime Ukrainian context, where sustainability themes carry immediate personal significance.

The study is limited by its small sample size and single-institution scope, and further longitudinal and comparative research is needed across different disciplines and contexts. Future inquiries should also examine the specific challenges and opportunities of wartime higher education in Ukraine, as these findings may be relevant beyond the national setting.

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