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ADVANCING EU STANDARDS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Language education in Ukraine is undergoing processes of integration with the European standards. This includes the implementation of the competency-based approach, considering the European Language Framework and adapting educational programs.

Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, as the leading centre of academic development in the border region, actively promotes the integration of Ukrainian higher education into the European community. Its active participation in international programs, membership in international academic associations, and partnerships with leading European universities significantly improve the level of the educational process and contribute to the creation of joint curricula that meet EU standards.

Implementation of Erasmus+ programs and support of EU initiatives helped the university to integrate European research components into the curricula of various faculties. The courses on EU language policy, European culture, and educational standards allow students to expand their knowledge and better adapt to international requirements, which increases their competitiveness in the labour market.

The need for multilingual professionals with a high level of intercultural competence is an important factor contributing to a successful career in the EU. Students studying foreign languages and linguistics are the most motivated group among Erasmus+ participants, as language skills are an essential prerequisite for employment in the EU.

The Skills Intelligence platform is an effective tool for assessing and forecasting labour market needs in Europe and helps to better align education systems with the requirements of the workforce. It enables students and graduates to assess their own skills and career prospects.

The language industry in the EU and Ukraine includes translation and interpreting, language education, language technology, and related fields. However, there are differences in approaches to language education, particularly in assessing the level of graduates' language skills. In Ukraine, the CEFR system is not officially applied in higher education institutions. Instead, independent language certification is widely practised. Erasmus+ courses facilitate language training by aligning it with European standards and market demand. The results of students' self-assessment on the CEFR scale confirm the positive

impact of such courses. This testifies to the fact that motivated students are well prepared to participate in Erasmus+ projects and are interested in Ukraine's integration with the EU and further academic and professional cooperation.

Keywords: EU educational standards; EU language policy; competency-based approach; intercultural competence; Erasmus+ courses; Skills Intelligence platform; labour market; competitiveness; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; language skills.

Fig. 5. Ref. 19.

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ПРОСУВАННЯ СТАНДАРТІВ ЄС У МОВНІЙ ОСВІТІ: УКРАЇНА НА ШЛЯХУ ДО ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОГО СОЮЗУ

У мовній освіті України відбуваються процеси зближення з європейськими стандартами, що включає впровадження компетентнісного підходу, врахування Європейської мовної рамки та інтеграцію освітніх програм.

Волинський національний університет імені Лесі Українки як провідний центр академічного розвитку у прикордонному регіоні активно сприяє інтеграції української вищої освіти в європейський простір. Його активна участь у міжнародних програмах, членство в міжнародних академічних асоціаціях та партнерства з провідними європейськими університетами значно покращують рівень освітнього процесу та сприяють створенню спільних навчальних планів, що відповідають стандартам ЄС.

Реалізація програм Erasmus+ і підтримка ініціатив ЄС допомогли університету інтегрувати компоненти європейських досліджень у навчальні програми різних факультетів. Курси, присвячені мовній політиці ЄС, європейській культурі та освітнім стандартам, дозволяють студентам розширити свої знання та краще адаптуватися до міжнародних вимог, що підвищує їх конкурентоспроможність на ринку праці.

Потреба в багатомовних спеціалістах з високим рівнем міжкультурної компетенції є важливим фактором для успішної кар'єри в ЄС. Студенти, які вивчають іноземні мови та лінгвістику, є найбільш мотивованою групою серед учасників програм Erasmus+, адже мовні навички є важливим фактором для працевлаштування в ЄС.

Платформа Skills Intelligence є важливим інструментом для оцінки та прогнозування потреб ринку праці в Європі та допомагає краще узгоджувати системи освіти з вимогами робочої сили. Вона дає можливість студентам і випускникам оцінювати власні навички та кар'єрні прагнення.

Мовна індустрія в ЄС та Україні включає письмовий та усний переклад, мовну освіту, мовні технології й суміжні галузі. Однак існують розбіжності в підходах до мовної освіти, зокрема в оцінюванні рівня мовних навичок випускників. В Україні система CEFR офіційно не використовується у ЗВО, натомість застосовується в незалежній мовній сертифікації. Курси Еразмус+ сприяють покращенню мовної підготовки, узгоджуючи її з європейськими стандартами та ринковими вимогами. Результати самооцінювання студентів за шкалою CEFR підтверджують позитивний вплив таких курсів. Це свідчить про гарну підготовку мотивованих студентів до участі в проєктах Еразмус+ та їхню зацікавленість в інтеграції України з ЄС і подальшій академічній та професійній співпраці.

Ключові слова: освітні стандарти ЄС; мовна політика ЄС; компетентнісний підхід; міжкультурна компетенція; курси Еразмус+; платформа Skills Intelligence; ринок праці; конкурентоспроможність; Загальноєвропейські рекомендації з мовної освіти; мовні навички.

Introduction. At present, the Ukrainian society expects its higher education system to train future professionals who not only have fundamental knowledge and skills, but are also able to creatively approach extraordinary issues and be competitive in the labour market. The modern education system requires shifting the emphasis from the content of education (what is taught) to its result (what competencies students should have, what they should know, and how they will apply their knowledge). In other words, modern higher education is based on the competency-based training methods. Higher education institutions target their educational activities at developing key and professional competencies for future

specialists to be multifunctional, multipurpose, culturally sensitive, and capable of performing socially and professionally challenging tasks. The competency-based approach is becoming more and more common in recent years and claims to be the conceptual basis of educational policy implemented by both the state and influential international organisations, associations, strengthening the practicality of education as well as emphasizing the importance of competence, experience, and skills based on scientific knowledge.

Literature review. Ukrainian scientists L. Vashchenko, O. Ovcharuk, O. Pometun, N. Volkova, S. Trubacheva, L. Ovsienko, O. Hlushko, investigate Competency-based approach in the professional training of

future specialists [7; 13]; O. Topuzov, O. Lokshyna, S. Sysoieva, I. Borysenko, D. Voronina-Pryhodii, A. Dzhu-rylo, S. Kravchenko, O. Shparyk, I. Biskub study Integration processes in EU education sector [2; 10; 11; 14]; O. Pershukova, O. Fidkevych, O. Yakovleva discuss Language education and multilingualism [18]; T. Lipich, T. Atroshchenko, V. Polishchuk, O. Sadokhin, O. Osadcha introduce Intercultural competence in terms of professional culture [12; 16].

Methods. A thorough and methodical examination of the existing scholarly works was undertaken involving carefully chosen key terms with the aim of collecting current findings relevant to the topic: Advancing EU Language Education Standards. The study utilized thematic analysis as its core methodology. This approach aimed to pinpoint major themes that contributed meaningfully to our grasp of the complexities as to EU-Ukraine integration, and, ultimately, served to enhance the possibilities for future collaboration in both academic and professional arenas.

Discussion. Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (VNU) is the leading institution of higher education in the EU-Ukraine border region, with a student population exceeding 10,000. Given the presence of numerous EU-based companies and organizations operating in the Volyn region, there is a high demand for graduates with expertise in EU-related fields. Additionally, a significant number of VNU students and alumni pursue further studies at European universities or participate in Erasmus+ mobility programs. The most popular destinations include Poland, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, France, Spain, and Italy.

Recognizing the importance of Ukraine's integration with the European Union in the field of higher education, VNU holds membership in several prominent international networks and associations, including the European University Association, the Eastern-European University Network, the Baltic-Ukrainian Academic Consortium, the Consortium of Ukrainian Universities and the University of Warsaw, and the Cross-Border Innovation Cluster. The university's implementation of dual-degree programs in cooperation with AGH University of Science and Technology (Germany), Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, the University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin, and the University of Warsaw (Poland) has facilitated the development of joint curricula, academic courses, and educational standards, thereby promoting tangible integration with the European Higher Education Area.

Over the past decade, VNU has actively participated in numerous EU-supported educational initiatives under the Erasmus+ Programme, including TEMPUS, ATHENA, MILETUS, and approximately ten Jean Monnet Modules [4; 5; 6]. During this period, components of EU studies have been incorporated into the curricula of the Faculties of Foreign Philology, Interna-

tional Relations, Psychology, and Law. These courses have attracted a growing number of graduate and postgraduate students who express a keen interest in topics such as EU Language Policy and Planning, EU Communication Strategy, European Culture, and European Educational Standards.

One of the most frequently discussed themes in the Erasmus+ projects was "Languages for Growth and Jobs". The results of the educational programs demonstrated a steadily increasing interest among Ukrainian university students in the prospect of employment within the European Union. Visual and graphical materials presented during lectures highlighted that many EU firms face challenges in securing contracts due to inadequate language skills and limited intercultural competence among their employees. As a multilingual and multicultural union, the EU has recognized the need for a more strategic approach to multilingual communication. Language and linguistics students have emerged as the most motivated cohort, perceiving real opportunities for employment in EU member states.

Our observations indicate that one of the key reasons behind the popularity of Erasmus+ courses among VNU students is the opportunity for foreign language learners to study or train abroad in disciplines beyond their primary field of language education. These programs allow them not only to specialize in other academic or professional areas but also to enhance their language proficiency and intercultural communication skills – attributes that are highly valued by employers.

A focus on the outcomes of Erasmus student exchange programs and Jean Monnet activities suggests that graduates with international experience enjoy a competitive advantage in the labour market.

As part of the Erasmus+ courses, language and linguistics students were introduced to the *Skills Intelligence* platform [15], developed by the EU in collaboration with employers' organizations. *Skills Intelligence* provides data on sector-specific skill requirements, including projections for language skills. Since there is no equivalent platform in the Ukrainian labour market, this component of the Erasmus curriculum consistently received the most positive feedback from participants. The platform transforms labour market data into accurate and timely insights that support policy-making in the areas of skills development and employment in Europe (<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-intelligence>).

Skills Intelligence is now officially integrated into the development of academic curricula across the EU. It is designed to enhance Europe's ability to assess and anticipate labour market needs and to align educational and training systems more closely with workforce demands. At VNU, students were trained to utilize this tool to assess their own skills and career aspirations effectively.

Particular attention was given to analyzing the skills required of teaching professionals within the EU.

According to *Skills Intelligence*, “workers in this occupation teach, design and modify education curricula, inspect and advise on teaching methods, and make decisions concerning the organisation of teaching and related activities in schools and universities. Occupations in this group include university and higher education lecturers, vocational and secondary education teachers, primary school and early childhood teachers, special needs teachers, and information technology trainers.

Typically, people in this occupation will have completed between three and six years of higher education.”

Using the platform’s visualization tools, a graph was presented to illustrate the projected demand for teaching professionals across EU countries (Fig. 1). The future job prospect index for teaching professionals in the EU from 2022 to 2035 stands at 67 points, with a minimum of 17 in Malta and a maximum of 73 in Italy (Fig. 1).

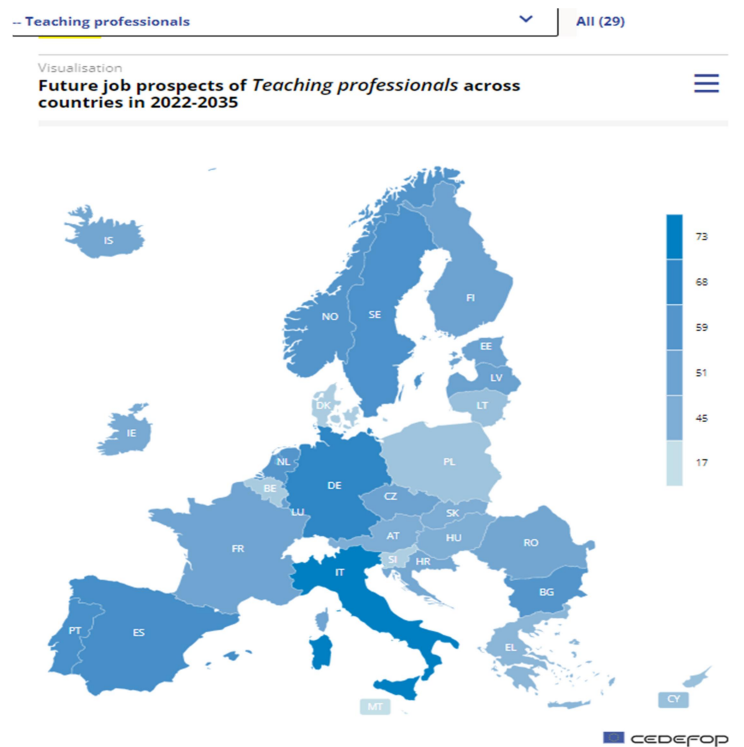


Figure 1. A need for teaching professionals in the EU countries (Skills Intelligence)

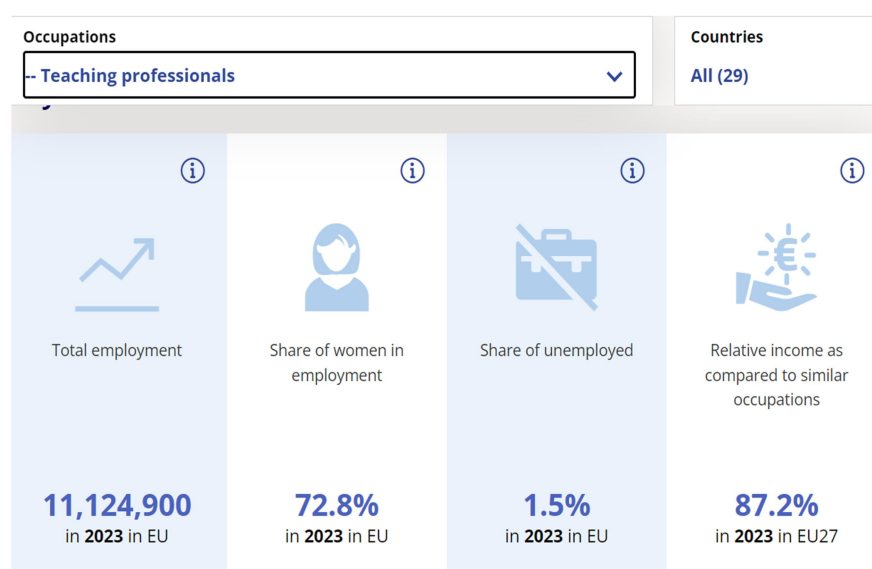


Figure 2. Statistical profile for teaching professionals in the EU (Skills Intelligence, 24.05.2025)

Basic employment parameters for teaching professional in the European Union, such as gender, degree of unemployment are presented in Fig. 2.

The prospect of teaching languages within the European Union was, understandably, one of the

primary reasons why students at our university enrolled in various EU-oriented courses offered through Erasmus+ projects. As part of the teaching activities, a survey was conducted to identify the key milestones in the development of language education in Ukraine.

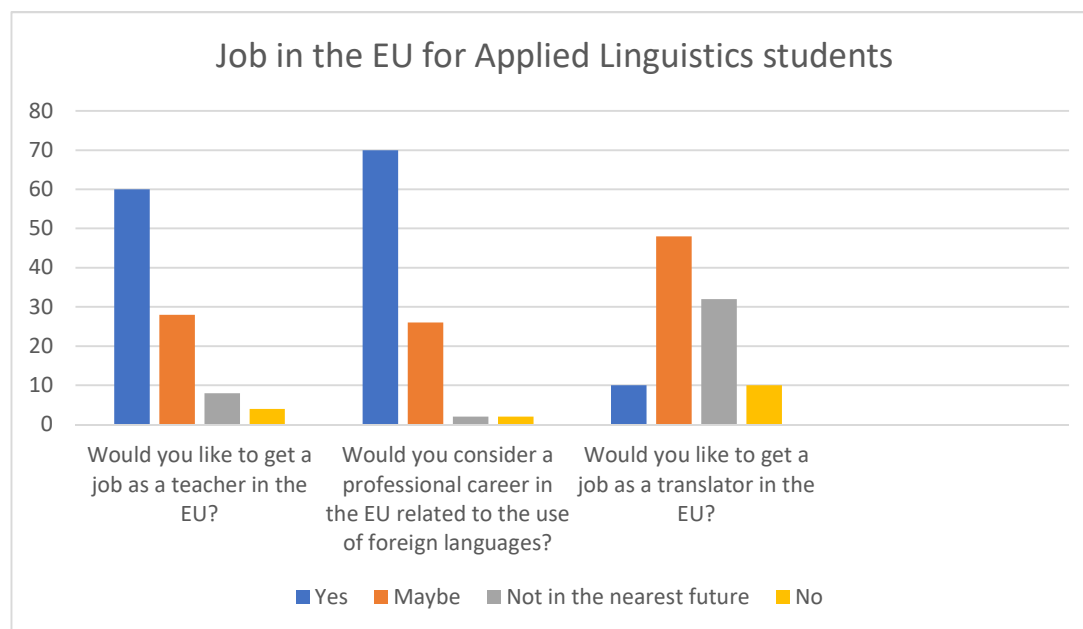


Figure 3. Jobs in the EU for Applied Linguistics students

As the chart in Fig. 3 indicates, the majority of Erasmus+ course participants expressed a strong interest in pursuing employment within the European Union, specifically in roles that require the use of foreign languages for professional purposes. Many students also demonstrated a clear motivation to begin teaching careers in EU countries. Interestingly, becoming a translator within the European Union was not identified as a top priority, which came as a surprising result for the teaching staff, especially given that the university curriculum includes a range of high-quality courses designed to train students as future translators.

It is important to note that, beyond language teaching and learning, the broader language industry in both the European Union and Ukraine encompasses translation and interpretation, language education, language technologies, and related fields. This sector is increasingly recognized as a profitable business domain and is among the fastest-growing areas of the modern economy [1].

Nevertheless, a significant discrepancy exists between language education practices in the EU and Ukraine – particularly in the area of language proficiency assessment for university graduates. Although the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) outlines six standardized language levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), this framework is not officially applied in the assessment of university stu-

dents in Ukraine. Instead, CEFR levels are predominantly used in independent language certification offered by various accredited language centers.

As part of several Jean Monnet Modules implemented between 2017 and 2025, we introduced students to the CEFR standards, assessment principles, and skills descriptors. Since the EU-grounded courses were integrated into the core curriculum of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, all students involved were studying two or three foreign languages. To assess the perceived quality of their academic preparation, we surveyed students regarding their satisfaction with the university's language programs and whether they felt adequately prepared to begin a professional career in the EU. Surprisingly, the majority of respondents rated their language education at a relatively low level when considering employment prospects within the European Union (Fig. 4).

The chart indicates that only 6 % of students specializing in language and linguistics are fully satisfied with the outcomes of language education in Ukraine. Based on our observations as educators, this dissatisfaction is not solely attributable to the quality of language instruction. Rather, it also reflects a degree of uncertainty among Ukrainian students regarding their future employment prospects. Many are unsure of what to expect in the job market and how their current language education aligns with the demands of contemporary professional life.

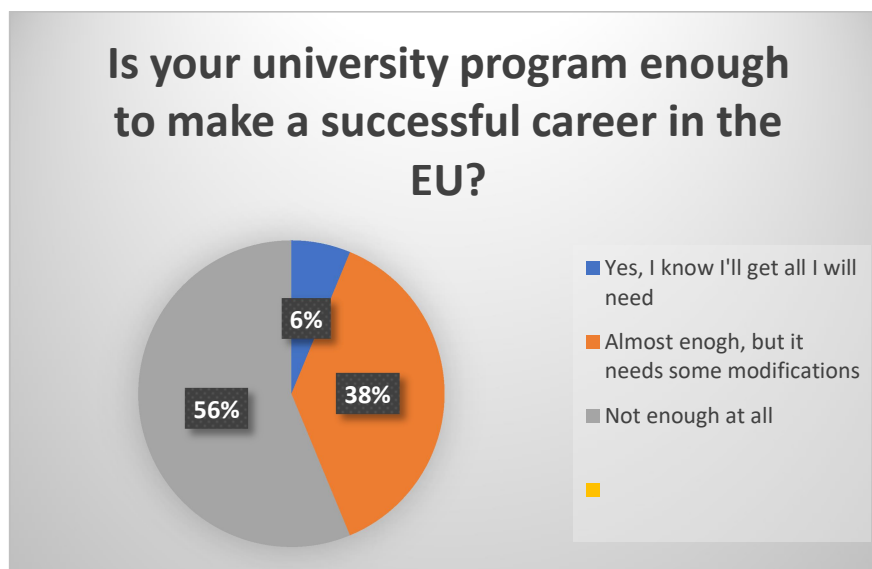


Figure 4. Degree of satisfaction among the students with the university language program

Conclusions. In conclusion, we emphasize that it is the competency-based approach that ensures the professional socialization of a university graduate. Due to its key principles, it is possible to model a new type of educational result, which is not limited to acquiring knowledge and skills, but is focused on solving specific real-life problems. Erasmus+ courses represent a valuable opportunity to enhance the quality of language instruc-

tion, which, while not inherently deficient, requires alignment with broader European standards and labour market needs. Encouragingly, our optimism is supported by the findings of a subsequent self-assessment survey, in which students were asked to evaluate their language proficiency using the CEFR framework. Figure 4 presents the results of this self-assessment, conducted among participants of various Erasmus+ courses.

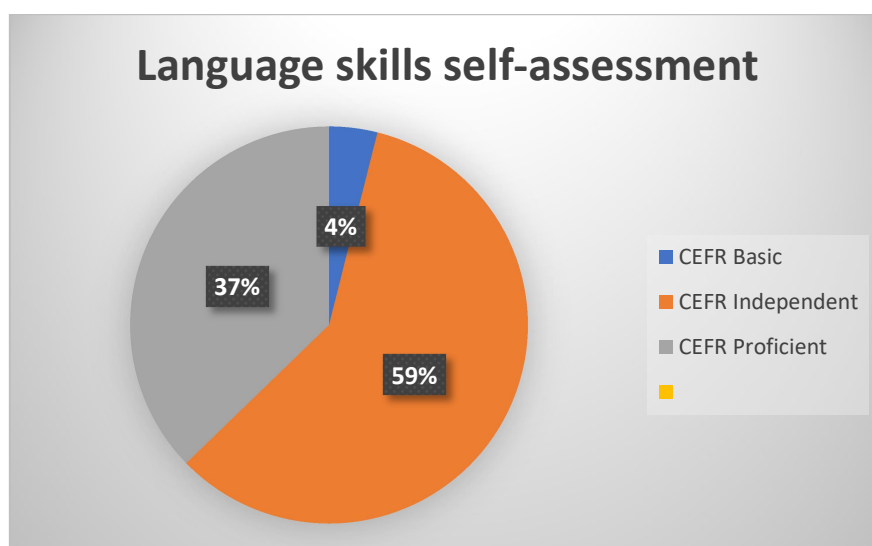


Figure 5. Language skills self-assessment done by the Erasmus+ courses participants

Figure 5 suggests that, despite the overall low subjective evaluation of the university's language programs, the vast majority of course participants demonstrate a strong command of English. Specifically, 37 % identified themselves as proficient users, while 59 % classified themselves as independent users of English as a second language. These results provide a

solid basis for optimism, indicating that the most capable and motivated students are well-prepared to engage with Erasmus+ projects. Their participation not only reflects a desire to enhance language proficiency but also a strong interest in deepening their understanding of EU-Ukraine integration and fostering future academic and professional cooperation.

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“Бути простим – це найкраще у світі”.

Гілберт Кім Честертон
англійський письменник, філософ

“Освіта повинна розвивати сили голови, серця й рук”.

Йоганн Генріх Песталоцці
швейцарський педагог

“Найголовніша мудрість життя – пізнати самого себе”.

Тригорій Сковорода
український філософ, педагог

