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EXTERNAL INDEPENDENT EVALUATION IN ENGLISH AS A CRITERION FOR ADMISSION TO MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS IN UKRAINE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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The problem of external independent evaluation in English for admission Master's degree programs in Ukraine is considered in the article. The perspective for further improvement of English teaching and learning standards at Ukrainian universities has been found. The correspondence to the CEFR basic levels and English proficiency has been identified. Conceptual Principles of State Policy on the Development of English in the Field of Higher Education are considered. The study included 1546 participants. The age of students, who studied to gain the first higher education, was between 17 and 20. The students were not familiar with the structure of External Independent Evaluation and they have never passed it. The research was carried out during the period 2018–2019. The relevance of English language competence in the professional context is noted emphasized as a key point of the presented research. The necessity to provide a sufficient competitive level for Ukrainian graduates through improving correspondent English language training has been considered. The study is based on a study of reports by British experts and contemporary scientific publications presented international researchers have focused on the problems of internationalization and perspectives for Ukrainian universities in the English language dimension. The relevance of studying and adaptation of the UK higher education successful practice has been highlighted. The problems and potential ways of improving students' English language proficiency in the given context are identified. In particular, the study contains important recommendations regarding the number of contact hours and the required levels of English proficiency for the main groups of participants in the educational process in higher education according to international standards.

Keywords: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; external independent evaluation; English; master's degree.*

Introduction. Recently, external independent assessment of entrants has become a major tool for evaluating students' selection to Ukrainian educational

institutions. Its main advantages include the historical majority of evaluations compared to traditional interventions, school assessments and common indicators, and the ability to compare all attributes with the same tool. This is important not only as a guarantee of general activity and equal access to quality education but also taking into account assistance in submitting documents to many higher educational institutions which would not be possible in appropriate cases. The European education system is characterized by a significant proportion of students who change their higher education when they move from bachelor's to master's programs.

Literature review. Experts note 17 thousand 677 participants of an external entrance exam in foreign languages could not overcome the test threshold "pass/fail" in 2019. The test was conducted on the technology of external testing; the results were necessary for admission to some master's specialisms. The test consisted of 42 tasks, each of which was evaluated at one point. At the same time the threshold score "pass/fail" is set at the level of 12 points. The review of the literature demonstrated that the idea of well-tested standard tests is directly or indirectly expressed in several works (Bolitho, 2017). But the details and possible implications of this idea under the current educational circumstances are still understudied. Addressing this problem, the present study is aimed to investigate both theoretical and practical aspects of the external independent evaluation in English under the current educational circumstances.

In particular, the determination of the minimum introductory level to domestic higher educational institutions is based on the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education", "On General Secondary Education", The procedure for conducting external independent assessment and monitoring of the quality of education, the Procedure for conducting an external independent assessment of the results obtained on the basis of complete general secondary education and, accordingly, provides for the command of English at level B1.

The development of the vocationally oriented language learning led to the introduction of the CEFR and its implementation in the educational system. The main goal of the CEFR system is to provide the method for evaluation and learning applicable to all European languages. In November 2001, the EU resolution recommended using CEFR to create national systems of assessment of linguistic competence (CEFR, 2003). In accordance with the CEFR, there are six levels of language proficiency developed by the Association of Language Experts ALTE (The Association of Language Testers in Europe): basic user (Breakthrough or A1; Waystage or A2), independent user (Threshold or B1; Vantage or B2), proficient user (Effective Operational Proficiency or C1; Mastery or C2) (CEFR, 2003).

In 2019 Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine published Conceptual Principles of State Policy on the Development of the English Language in the Field of Higher Education (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019). This document explains the ideology of changes that need to be implemented in English language education. Ministry of Education and Science has decided to provide entry-level B1 for all students at the beginning of their studies, and the goal is for all students to master the language at the appropriate level by 2023. For this purpose, the concept assumes that by 2023, B1 level of English will be required when entering the bachelor's degree.

This involves:

- passing a compulsory "screening" test in English by all entrants to establish proficiency;
- if the entry level is lower than B1, this does not deny the right to participate in the higher education admission competition normally, but such entrants must have passed a language intensive to reach the B1 level by the beginning of the academic year (by 1 September or 1 October).

Equal access to this language intensity is also ensured to achieve B1 level: full-time, distant.

It is envisaged that higher education standards will require that a bachelor's student, regardless of specialty, must acquire a B1 + foreign language if he/she wants to obtain a diploma. For senior levels - masters and PhDs with an academic component - B2 level will be required.

To encourage universities to teach and students to study English during their undergraduate studies, the concept involves increasing hours and changing the content of the language disciplines.

The main arguments for change, according to the document, is:

- recognition of the need to ensure the competitiveness of Ukrainian scientists and graduates at the national and international levels;
- striving for the internationalization of higher education;
- programs for academic and educational integration within the EU;
- compulsory study of English in primary and secondary education;
- studying and applying the experience of the project "English for Universities", which supported the introduction and dissemination of English language proficiency and professional English language teaching in English;
- adoption of the National Curriculum for English language proficiency for use in Ukrainian universities
- the extension of CEFR to determine the level of English language proficiency in Ukraine;

The purpose of the state policy on the development of English in higher education in Ukraine is to create opportunities for cultural, educational and

professional development and prosperity of every citizen, promote integration and economic growth of higher education institutions, improve the quality of educational services in the field of higher education of Ukraine, promote the implementation of European and the global aspirations of Ukraine and its economic growth.

The **purpose** of the paper is to: present the results of the VDEUNU student's familiarity with External Independent Evaluation in English and attitude to international standardized test in English; consider the international requirements for graduates and university teachers' English language proficiency level; consider Conceptual Principles of State Policy on the Development of the English Language in the Field of Higher Education; identify the prospects and ways of implementing successful international experience in the mentioned context.

Research Methods. The research and experimental work were conducted at the Department of Foreign languages and professional communication Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University (Sievierodonetsk, Ukraine). Overall the research included 1546 participants. The age of students, who studied to gain the first higher education, was between 17 and 20. The students were not familiar with the structure of External Independent Evaluation and they have never passed it. The research was carried out during the period 2018–2019.

In the study, we used such methods as a questionnaire. The questionnaire of the students and was held on the basis of modern service Moodle. This service gives an opportunity to make a questionnaire of any type and any theme. The author can choose the number of answers in accordance with the theme chosen. The participants of the research were asked to answer seven questions of the questionnaire:

1. Are you going to enter the Master's degree program?

Yes, I am. – 97%

No, I am not. – 1%

I am not sure yet. – 2%

2. How can the Master's degree help you in the future?

It will help me in my future career. -46%

It will help me to gain new knowledge and conduct research. -3%

It will allow getting a pay rise. – 49%

3. Do you think is it justified to take an external independent test for admission to the Master's program?

Yes, it is. – 0% No, it isn't. – 100%

4. What do you think is it possible to prepare for External independent evaluation only attending university classes?

Yes, it is. There are enough classes to prepare. – 0%

- No, it isn't. There aren't enough classes to prepare. – 100%
5. **Have you ever heard about CEFR and international tests (IELTS, APTIS, etc)?**
Yes, I have. – 73% No, I haven't. 26%
6. **Do you attend any English courses, clubs, etc?**
Yes, I do. – 27% No, I don't. – 73%
7. **If there was an alternative to pass External Independent evaluation or international test what would you choose?**
External independent evaluation. – 15%
International tests. – 85%

Discussion. Interpreting the response patterns of the questionnaire, we have concluded that the majority of Bachelor students from Ukrainian universities are aware of the importance of External Independent Evaluation. But still, the alarming thing is that more than the third of the surveyed consider EIE and preparation somewhat important. The results of the questionnaire show that 73% students neither know nor use any other forms of preparation except attending university English classes.

The positive aspect is that almost 90 per cent of the respondents think that is justified to take an external independent test for admission to the Master's program.

The responses for the fifth question as for the about the CEFR and international exams (IELTS, APTIS) are surprising. The lack of knowledge has a side effect on both teachers and students. An English teacher has to understand and inform the students about CEFR level and opportunities to pass international exams.

In accordance with the recommendations of the National Program for English for professional communication, developed by a team of Ukrainian experts, together with experts from the British Council, and recommended by Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for use in Ukrainian higher education institutions, which trains specialists in different specialties, in the case of a level of English proficiency the language of the entrant is lower than the above requirements, which may occur for various objective reasons. When discussing the feasibility of testing foreign languages in the form of external testing should take into account the following. On the one hand, studying in magistracy involves students acquiring certain research skills. At the same time, one of the main requirements for the graduate is his ability to work with sources of professional information, among which a significant place occupies foreign languages (first of all, English-speaking) sources. From this perspective, checking the level of preparation of foreign language applicants for the selection of magistracy, including through standardized testing methods, seems entirely

justified. But there is a question as to what the test of a foreign language should be. In my opinion, it would be advisable to make such a test structurally closer to the appropriate part of the GRE test used for the admission of magistracy in the United States or to the German TestDaF test. It should also be borne in mind that there are well-tested standard tests (TOEFL, IELTS, etc.) that are widely used around the world to test English and other languages.

According to specific goals, each university can adapt its use of APTIS in the educational process in its way: from evaluation of the teaching staff to solving a particular problem in the training.

For example, APTIS certificate is officially recognized by Ministry of Education and Sports in Albania for all students applying for Master's and Ph.D. programs. For example, in 2012, the State University of Ilya (Georgia) introduced a law according to which each graduate must have a certain level of English proficiency to obtain a diploma.

Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research has focused on the following two promising areas for implementing the APTIS potential:

1. Intensification of the development of English language skills for researchers to obtain a Master's degree in English or to conduct future teaching in English;
2. Assessment of the level of English language proficiency by scientists before and after the relevant training course.

Nazarbayev University (Kazakhstan) focused on the possibility of using APTIS as a tool for filtering potential applicants for scholarships. Assessing the level of English language proficiency among entrants through this tool also allowed universities to determine the readiness for more serious international testing of IELTS. As a result, students who receive high marks with IELTS are offered appropriate scholarships.

An important issue in the context of deciding on the choice of an optimal tool for monitoring the quality of language education is understanding the implications of testing. In international practice, distinguish between "high-stakes tests" and "low-stakes tests".

APTIS belongs to a group of low rates and provides for a report that has no expiration date, while, for example, IELTS is accompanied by a certificate whose results are recommended to be reliable for two years. Their further reliability remains at the discretion of the organization to which the relevant document is submitted.

Using the diagnostic study of British experts used in the context of English language learning, professional orientation in domestic universities, the main problems of interest are practically used, using the specific forms required through.

In Ukrainian higher educational institutions, the situation with the distribution of classroom hours for mastering ESP by students of non-linguistic specialisms is different. The number of academic hours is regulated by the decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine № 642, dated the 9th July 2009 "About the Organization of Studying the Humanities".

According to this document, students are provided with 5 ECTS credits (equivalent to 180 hours of teaching load with the individual work) for studying ESP. It is necessary to point out that usually the ESP course that introduces students to their profession is taught during the 1st and 2nd year of study, in some universities particularly, in Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University – during only 3rd semester. The restricted amount of English classes at non-linguistic universities only complicates the necessity of teaching professionally-oriented English to develop all the necessary English communication skills and competences as well as to reach the target level B2.

At the national strategic level, experts identify a clear need to modernize and internationalize universities throughout Ukraine in the context of the introduction of international standards for teaching English. According to representatives of the international community, the level of autonomy of universities and the limits of their responsibility are not sufficiently defined, first of all, by Ministry itself. In particular, we are talking about the conclusion of an appropriate curriculum, the creation of quality English language teaching materials and the determination of the number of required contact hours (the time period during which the student receives active instructions and which is considered as part of the training course) for the acquisition of a certain level of English languages in accordance with the European Recommendations on Language Education. According to British experts, this, at the moment, leads to confusion and indecisiveness, and sometimes serves as a beneficial justification for "convenient inactivity".

Consequently, the relevant provisions of the National Program were not effectively disseminated. As the British experts report, they either do not know about them, or they are ignored (Bolitho, 2017). In particular, the document contains important recommendations regarding the number of contact hours and the required levels of English proficiency for the main groups of participants in the educational process in higher education according to international standards. Therefore, there is an urgent need to draw attention to an existing problem related to national standards and curricula.

Conclusion. Summarizing the information collected, it can be concluded that the current challenges in the field of English teaching, learning and assessment in Ukraine are caused by the integration of the Ukrainian education system into the international academic community. The implementation of

International English Tests into the process of teaching ESP in Ukrainian higher educational institutions according to CEFR, set by the Council of Europe will undoubtedly lead to positive changes and transformations of foreign language education. Putting into practice the international certification of English proficiency is possible under the support of the Ukrainian university authorities as well as through the implementation of educational reforms. It is therefore necessary for further research to examine in more detail the structure of the EIE in English for master's degree programs. It is to be regretted that much of the good work that has been implemented through individual initiatives that we encountered in Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University (APTIS TEST FOR TEACHERS, APTIS GENERAL, CIVELT, etc.) have not been adopted on a wider scale. It is hoped that the findings will generate debate about External Independent Evaluation for entering master's degree programs as well as teaching and learning in higher education in Ukraine and will inform discussions and decisions about largescale reform and policy change by stakeholders at all levels of the system.

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ЗОВНІШНЄ НЕЗАЛЕЖНЕ ОЦІНЮВАННЯ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ ЯК КРИТЕРІЙ ДОСТУПУ ДО МАГІСТРАТУРИ В УКРАЇНІ: ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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У статті розглядається проблема зовнішнього незалежного тестування з англійської мови при вступі до магістратури в Україні. Визначена перспектива подальшого вдосконалення стандартів викладання та вивчення англійської мови в українських ЗВО. Розглянуто концептуальні основи державної політики щодо розвитку англійської мови в сфері вищої освіти. У дослідженні взяли участь 1546

учасників. Вік студентів, які взяли участь і навчаються на бакалавраті, був між 17 і 20 роками. Студенти не були знайомі зі структурою зовнішнього незалежного тестування і ніколи його не проходили. Дослідження проводилося в період 2018-2019 рр. В якості ключового моменту представленого дослідження підкреслюється актуальність знання англійської мови в професійному контексті. Розглянуто необхідність забезпечення достатнього рівня конкурентоспроможності для українських випускників шляхом удосконалення навчання англійської мови. Дослідження засноване на аналізі доповідей британських експертів та сучасних наукових публікацій, представлених міжнародними дослідниками, які зосередилися на проблемах інтернаціоналізації та перспективах українських університетів в аспекті освоєння англійської мови. Була підкреслена актуальність вивчення та адаптації успішної практики вищої освіти Великобританії. Виявлено проблеми та можливі шляхи підвищення рівня володіння англійською мовою в студентів у даному контексті. Зокрема, в дослідженні містяться важливі рекомендації щодо кількості контактних годин і необхідних рівнів володіння англійською мовою для основних груп учасників освітнього процесу у сфері вищої освіти у відповідності з міжнародними стандартами.

Ключові слова: CEFR, зовнішнє незалежне оцінювання, магістратура, англійська мова.

ВНЕШНЕЕ НЕЗАВИСИМОЕ ТЕСТИРОВАНИЕ ПО АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ КАК КРИТЕРИЙ ДОСТУПА К МАГИСТРАТУРЕ В УКРАИНЕ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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В статье рассматривается проблема внешнего независимого тестирования по английскому языку при поступлении в магистратуру в Украине. Определена перспектива дальнейшего совершенствования стандартов преподавания и изучения английского языка в украинских вузах. Рассмотрены концептуальные основы государственной политики по развитию английского языка в сфере высшего образования. В исследовании приняли участие 1546 участников. Возраст студентов, которые приняли участие и обучаются на бакалаврате, между 17 и 20 годами. Студенты не были знакомы со структурой внешнего независимого тестирования и никогда его не проходили. Исследование проводилось в период 2018–2019 гг. В качестве ключевого момента представленного исследования подчеркивается актуальность знания английского языка в профессиональном контексте. Рассмотрена необходимость обеспечения достаточного уровня конкурентоспособности для украинских выпускников путем совершенствования обучения английскому языку. Исследование основано на анализе докладов британских экспертов и современных научных публикаций, представленных международными исследователями, которые сосредоточились на проблемах интернационализации и перспективах украинских университетов в аспекте

освоения английского языка. Была подчеркнута актуальность изучения и адаптации успешной практики высшего образования Великобритании. Выявлены проблемы и возможные пути повышения уровня владения английским языком у студентов в данном контексте. В частности, в исследовании содержатся важные рекомендации относительно количества контактных часов и требуемых уровней владения английским языком для основных групп участников образовательного процесса в сфере высшего образования в соответствии с международными стандартами.

Ключевые слова: *CEFR, внешнее независимое тестирование, магистратура, английский язык.*

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