

National language policies and English proficiency in Ukrainian academia

Challenges and implications for research publishing

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Abstract

The study examines how national language policies in Ukraine shape English proficiency requirements for academics and evaluates whether their current language levels adequately support international research publishing. Through analysis of policy documents, sociological survey data and findings from empirical studies, this paper investigates institutional English-language proficiency requirements and their alignment with researchers' needs. The results show that while Ukraine has implemented comprehensive policies promoting English in academia, including mandatory B2 level for most academic degrees and positions, the average Ukrainian researcher's proficiency remains at the A2–B2 level. This gap between policy requirements and actual proficiency levels significantly impacts researchers' ability to publish internationally. The analysis reveals that even though required B2 proficiency enables basic academic communication, successful research publishing requires C1/C2 level skills for navigating complex international academic discourse. The study argues that the uniform B2 requirement across all academic positions fails to address the varying linguistic demands. The findings also highlight the necessity of developing consistent national English-language proficiency assessment standards and implement more differentiated, discipline-specific language requirements. The research can inform policy revisions entailed by the development of targeted language support programmes. Further research should focus on conducting detailed language needs analyses across academic disciplines, developing domain-specific resources and scaffolding. This would enable institutions to better support Ukrainian scholars in meeting international academic standards and enhance their participation in global scholarly discourse.

Keywords: Ukraine, language policy, English-language proficiency (ELP), higher educational institution (HEI), English-medium instruction (EMI), research publication

1. Introduction

Being a major language of international congresses, conferences and global publishing forums, English has been justly recognised as a “lingua academica” (Phillipson 2006). It is undoubtedly the main language of scientific knowledge dissemination today as 74% of scientific periodicals worldwide are issued in English with more than 90% of the social science articles (Lillis and Curry 2006; Montgomery 2013) and 98% of the publications in the natural and basic sciences (Gordin 2015).

Many studies in recent years consider the issue of Englishisation in the academic world highlighting both the recent worldwide trend towards English Medium Instruction (Airey 2020; Wilkinson et al. 2021; Borg 2019) and the main dilemmas that this great development has aroused for scientific enquiry as well as for research publishing on the international and national levels (Gotti 2017; Galloway et al. 2020; Cabral-Cardoso 2021; König 2021; Wilkinson et al. 2021).

While one of the mainstream trends is the homogenising process deriving from higher education (HE) internationalisation (Swales 1997; Phillipson 2006; Phillipson et al. 2015; Hudzik 2015; Bolitho and West 2017), academic discourse is not at all uniform but varies according to such factors as language competence, disciplinary field, community membership, professional expertise and generic conventions, as well as the factors which clearly reflect aspects of the local tradition and culture (Gotti 2017; Xavier Vila 2021).

The global premium of English cannot but influence the Ukrainian academic landscape where practices surrounding scholarly knowledge production are predetermined by “extending circle” context (Kachru 1985; Lillis and Curry 2006). Unlike “inner” and “outer” circles where English is an official or a second language, in Ukraine it is a foreign language which historically has been granted a relatively low profile (Yakhontova 1997), thus, limited opportunities for learning English.

With the fall of the “iron curtain” Ukrainian researchers received an opportunity to join the world scholarly community, but the playing field remains uneven because of unfavourable economic conditions and low salaries in academia (Curry and Lillis 2004), less funding and time for research and travel, less access to well-equipped libraries and laboratories and less research assistance and support (Lillis and Curry 2006) in comparison with “inner” and “outer” circle countries.

Despite working in non-Anglophone context, Ukrainian scholars must actively use English for work-related activities. What is more, they are under

increasing pressure to publish their research in the medium of English as internationalisation has been gaining momentum in Ukrainian academia over the recent decades, spurred by several top-down and bottom-up initiatives (Lanvers and Luniova 2023; Hladchenko 2024; Abramo et al. 2023; Zakharchuk 2024). The Russian–Ukrainian war and forced academic migration have undoubtedly further sensitised academics and pedagogues to the issues of language choice and language power. Thus, understanding the language-related challenges that Ukrainians face in communicating their research internationally is crucial to reducing global inequality in science.

Our study addresses the current English-language state policies in Ukraine and their effect on Ukrainian academia to investigate how they shape and foster contemporary Ukrainian academics' English-language proficiency (ELP) as one of the important factors contributing to successful research communication. Following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), we define language proficiency as an individual's ability to use a language effectively and appropriately in various contexts and categorises proficiency into six levels, from A1 "Beginner" to C2 "Proficient" (CEFR 2001).

The significance of English proficiency has been widely examined in EMI and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts, with studies mainly focusing on students and showing that there is a strong correlation between a high-level proficiency and academic success across disciplines especially in non-native English settings. Since it is Ukrainian academics' current ELP levels that our knowledge of is still lacking and requires a deeper examination, in this paper we seek to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What language policies regulate institutional requirements for the English-language proficiency (ELP) of Ukrainian researchers?
- To what extent is the current English proficiency level of an average Ukrainian academic sufficient for research publishing?

The answers to these questions will help to identify what kind and extent of potential support Ukrainian academics require to better communicate their research internationally.

This study is structured as follows. First, we review the existing literature on Ukrainian academics' English-language competence. Next, we examine the state policies that promote English and its current status in Ukraine. We then narrow our focus to the ongoing processes of Englishisation in Ukrainian academia and their impact on researchers. Following this, we analyse the ELP levels among Ukrainian researchers, interpreting and comparing data from

multiple sources. Finally, we discuss whether the ELP levels declared and required by state academic institutions align with the research and publishing needs of Ukrainian scholars.

2. Literature review

Research of relevant literature within the context of ELP among Ukrainian scholars remains limited, with existing studies addressing some aspects of academic language competence lacking a comprehensive assessment of its current level. This gap may be attributed to the fluid nature and complexity of the issue, as well as the absence of nationally recognised standards and procedures to measure it.

Nonetheless, the increasing importance of Englishisation and internationalisation as an obvious prerequisite of scientific advance in the case of Ukraine, particularly as the country strengthens its ties with Europe, has been widely acknowledged by many researchers (Bolitho and West 2017; Borg 2019; Lanvers and Lunyova 2023; Roberts et al. 2019). Studies have also identified a positive statistical correlation between the population's language competence in Ukraine and the country's innovativeness, a crucial factor in scientific advancement (Luis et al. 2023). Despite these insights, the national official data on ELP in Ukrainian academia remain scarce and those existing ones are often difficult to interpret (Беловецька 2020).

To address the issue, Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEIs) have implemented a minimum B2 proficiency requirement for faculty members, as mandated by national legislation (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2016). Since CEFR is a well-established and widely recognised tool for language competence measuring, some scholars call for not inventing the wheel and advocate for adopting CEFR as a standardised tool to establish national ELP benchmarks and assessment systems, for HEI staff in Ukraine (Беловецька 2020). Taking into consideration European experience of such standards' development and implementation, it might help to avoid missteps and additional funding waste. This approach could also help to create a system of in-service pedagogical staff language training to foster ELP in Ukrainian academia and allow publication in international journals.

Although Ukrainian remains the dominant language in which papers are published in Ukrainian journals (90%), the inclusion of English and other languages reflects an attempt to strike a balance between cultural identity and global engagement in Ukrainian academia. Thus, with 5% of English-only

journals in Ukraine, 59% of all national journals indicate that they would publish articles in English to allow more local researchers to participate in international research activities and reach target audiences abroad (Nazarovets 2024).

Furthermore, HEIs are seriously concerned with the current language agenda of using Ukrainian, Russian, English and other languages of the European Union in academic context. The national policies and HEIs actively promote de-Russification giving equal prominence to Ukrainisation and Englishisation and/or westernisation in their vision and recommended practices (Lanvers and Lunyova 2023). The study clearly reflects the high pitch of the current triple language agenda comparing it with the firing line, that is, exposed to constant political and ideological pressures. Despite the efforts to promote English in Ukrainian academia, proficiency levels among Ukrainian scholars remain a significant challenge. The study by Lanvers and Lunyova even describes Ukraine as “starting from a low base” (Lanvers and Lunyova 2023) regarding English proficiency.

Nonetheless, Ukrainian scientists must cope with a low level of proficiency in the languages of international scientific communication to gain recognition at the international level and to adhere to high standards of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which expects them to have articles in academic journals included in international databases. There have been some attempts to disclose the problems and prospects of Ukrainian scientists in their efforts to publish their research results in academic journals, indexed in Web of Science and Scopus, aiming to identify the motives of Ukrainian scholars when writing/ not writing scientific articles (Fiialka 2018). Poor English is named the third among the reasons of paper rejection. “I do not speak English” is listed as the factor why 13% of researchers have no articles either in Ukrainian or in foreign journals indexed in Web of Science and (or) Scopus (Fiialka 2021). Among the motives and stimulus for publishing co-authored articles, 7.4% of the respondents identified the need to co-operate with the English-speaking colleague for the purpose of translation being not confident in their language skills or having insufficient ELP (Fiialka 2021).

Similarly, research on grant writing and its challenges for Ukrainian academics highlights the critical role of ELP in this area, reveals concerns about the limited engagement and training available for English for research publication purposes, and stresses the need for language support policies and skills development programmes (Shykhnenko and Sbruieva 2024).

Meanwhile, even scholars with an adequate ELP level who are actively involved in research publishing have many language-related concerns, like any

non-native English author. Studies group the main difficulties of Ukrainian scholarly writers under such categories as linguistic (grammar, punctuation and stylistic), organisational (textual), citational and rhetorical, and offers some measures which can alleviate the problems (Yakhontova 2020). Another study based on the researcher's own writing and teaching experience identifies paragraphing in English-mediated articles as a particular struggle and challenge. The research examines the mistakes committed by Ukrainian and other Slavic authors in their scientific publications in the field of biomedicine and provides some guidelines on how to improve the skill of paragraphing and avoid mistakes (Yakhontova 2020).

Further studies on typical error analysis address nature and inter-/intralingual origins of the drawbacks in Ukrainian researchers' writing (Kozolup et al. 2023). In particular, the analysis identifies and interprets the deviations from the Standard English in scholarly research writing of Ukrainian authors in the field of life sciences, exemplifying and classifying errors into categories based on the type of language misuse, tracing possible connections of an error to the authors' first language interference. These findings, based on a solid database of typical linguistic challenges of Ukrainian scholarly writers, suggest that a well-structured tailor-made English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) training programme could help foster writing skills and publication success in Ukrainian academia.

However, beyond individual language challenges, systemic solutions are needed to improve ELP of Ukrainian scholars. Studies consider general pedagogical issues of the Ukrainian researchers' ELP improvement (Babushko 2016). Research emphasises that one of the main factors which can stimulate the learning process of the specific category of research-engaged adult learners could be the adherence to and integration of andragogical, didactic and peer-to-peer principles which can create an adequate theoretical and methodological basis for realising necessary instructional ERPP support.

Meanwhile, studies of socio-material paradoxes in global academic publishing demonstrate how gaps between policy requirements and institutional support mediate English-language academic literacy for Ukrainian participants (Rounsaville and Zemliansky 2020). The research shows that scholarly writers work within a set of paradoxes around the simultaneously expanding and constricting nature of English-language academic literacy at the intersection of stratified opportunities for practicing lived academic English and a complex of material constraints and demands. The findings suggest that these complexities add to existing challenges on the way to adapting international research and publication standards in Ukraine.

Since in the career of every Ukrainian scholar there are mandatory barriers to meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine on the number and type of publications, it is critical to gain a better understanding of current ELP level in Ukrainian academia and the challenges faced by Ukrainian academic authors in the context of communicating the research internationally. These considerations guided our selection of research methods, ensuring they effectively capture the complexities of this issue.

3. Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore ELP among Ukrainian academics, integrating findings from national policy analysis with empirical survey data and combining both qualitative and quantitative data analysis to offer a comprehensive view of the current language competence landscape in Ukrainian HE.

A comprehensive review of relevant scientific literature allowed to establish a foundation for understanding how much is currently known about the best practices and common challenges in promoting English proficiency in Ukrainian academic settings.

In addition to the literature analysis, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on official Ukrainian policy documents available on the websites of key government institutions, such as the President of Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Ukrainian Parliament), the Common State Portal of Executive Power of Ukraine and the National News Agency of Ukraine (Ukrinform). This analysis aimed to uncover the formation of regulatory framework that shapes English-language requirements and standards for academic professionals since Ukraine gained its independence.

For the quantitative component, the study explored the findings from several sources. These included the data collected in a nationwide quantitative sociological survey assessing the level of English and other foreign languages proficiency among the Ukrainian population. The research, conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology at the request of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and commissioned by the USAID Communications Transformation Project, provided a comprehensive overview of proficiency levels as of December 2022 to January 2023.

Additional data was drawn from a 2023 survey carried out by the Razumkov Center, a reputable sociological research institution in Ukraine. This survey

gathered self-assessment responses from 2,017 adult Ukrainian citizens, who provided insight into their perceived levels of ELP.

Another major data source was a free globally available EF Standard English Test (SET), designed and promoted by EF Education First company, and their English Proficiency Index calculated in 2013–2024 for 113 countries including Ukraine. This historical perspective facilitated a longitudinal analysis, enabling the researchers to assess any shifts in English proficiency among the Ukrainian test-takers over time, starting from 2013. It might be used to provide a benchmark for subsequent changes, particularly in light of geopolitical events that may have influenced language education and usage in the country.

Further insights were obtained from the “English for Universities” project conducted by the British Council Ukraine and the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science during October 2014–November 2016, and aimed to explore English proficiency level of faculty members and academics in fifteen Ukrainian universities. The inclusion of this dataset was focal as it added depth to the analysis of language competence of academics specifically.

To synthesise the findings from these diverse sources, a combination of content and statistical analysis methods was employed. Statistical analysis allowed to process and interpret the quantitative survey data. Examination of proficiency levels across different demographics revealed some patterns and correlations within the data and allowed to interpret the current state of ELP within Ukrainian academic community. Through this approach the study illustrated the extent to which the language level aligns with or diverge from meeting the actual needs of Ukrainian scholars to publish their research in reputable international journals.

4. Results

4.1 National language policies and English proficiency trends in Ukraine

Over the past decade, English proficiency in Ukraine has undergone a gradual but notable transformation, driven by both national language policies and broader sociopolitical changes. Having gained its independence in 1991, Ukraine started its attempts to join the European structures and practices. In 2005 Ukraine was admitted to the Bologna Process which set the beginning of Ukraine’s joining European Higher Education Area and defining the contours of the HE system (Nikolaeva 2015; Kutsyuruba and Kovalchuk 2015; Goodman 2010). Since English is often used as the primary language for international communication in education, research and policy within the Bologna

framework, this led to a push for English-language skills within Ukrainian HEIs to better integrate with European academic and research communities (Zakharchuk 2024).

On 16 November 2015, the official decree of the President of Ukraine declared 2016 as the Year of the English language in Ukraine, signalling Ukraine's commitment to strengthening ties with the West (President of Ukraine 2015). The initiative promoted English through increasing formal and informal language education in schools, universities and workplaces, increasing accessibility and English proficiency among Ukrainians, especially the youth and professionals. This effort aligned with Ukraine's foreign policy priorities following the 2014 EU association agreement. The National Foreign Language Learning and Promotion Initiative, launched in June 2015, recognised English as the key for Ukraine's integration into the EU's business, cultural and educational spaces (Ukrinform 2015).

Ukraine's commitment to aligning its education with European standards translated into educational reform particularly under the New Ukrainian School (NUS) initiative launched in 2017 with the timeline to 2030 (Luis et al. 2023). Aiming to modernise learning from primary to higher education, it is meant to allow gradual implementation and adaptation across all educational levels (Hrynevych et al. 2023). English proficiency in the reform framework is both a practical skill for global engagement and a means to foster a more adaptable, well-rounded educational experience for Ukrainian students.

To improve English teaching from primary schools to higher education institutions (HEIs), the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine introduced communicative teaching methodologies and an extensive programme of English teacher training across Ukraine (Hrynevych et al. 2023). Along with the language teachers and instructors, the governments' initiative has also encouraged a greater emphasis on ELP of Ukrainian researchers and academics. According to the Decree of the President, knowledge of English was recognised as a qualifying requirement for occupying certain positions in universities and in the civil service. The president also proposed to introduce requirements for the English-language competence to award scientific degrees and academic status. Due to this, in December 2016 the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine approved official Procedure for Awarding Academic Titles to Research and Academic Staff (Haka3 2016).

Among other requirements, the seekers of associate professor and professor titles should have a B2 and above language proficiency certificate complying with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), or any qualification documents (a HE certificate, an academic degree) related

to the use of a foreign language, or at least ten works in English in publications included in the Scopus or Web of Science databases and having an ISSN number confirmed on the website of the International Centre for Periodicals Registration.

Consequently, considerable funds were designated for additional professional development opportunities for English-language instructors, along with plans to implement compulsory English proficiency tests for all government employees (Roberts et al. 2019). In 2017, the Ukrainian government passed legislation supporting a nationwide introduction of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) (Lanvers and Lunyova 2023). The country's commitment to widely introducing English into its educational system became evident through increasing the scope of ELT options in universities such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and the teaching of other subjects using EMI (Bolitho and West 2017).

Later, in 2019, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine created the Conception of the English Language Development in Universities (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2019) according to which HE standards were considered to require that all undergraduate students, seeking a bachelor's certificate regardless of their specialty, must master a foreign language at the B1+ level (Укрінформ 2019). For higher levels of master's and PhD students, the B2 level was approved as compulsory.

On 26 June 2023, the Ukrainian president introduced a bill establishing English as an official language for international communication in Ukraine (Ukrinform 2023). The law outlines the use of English in government and public sectors, specifying positions that require English proficiency, such as managers and heads of academic departments in HEIs. The cabinet of ministers has set a list of these positions in education and science, with a required language level of CEFR B2 or higher, which includes a 10% salary increase for those in such roles.

Though the provisions of the law come into force four years after the date of termination or cancellation of martial law in Ukraine, the state-driven language policies in the country made a positive impact and have been instrumental in gradually increasing the population's awareness and improving the language practices. Thus, a study from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, conducted in March 2023, found that 88% of the respondents believe that mastering English should be mandatory for Ukrainians (KIIS 2023). Aiming at assessing the level of foreign language proficiency among the adult population of Ukraine and the incentives to learning foreign languages, the study revealed that only an approximate third of population received an adequate level of language training and consequently possesses some confidence in their

English medium interactions. The survey also demonstrated that the majority (93%) of parents with children under the age of eighteen wanted their children to improve their level of English. Given the fact that those adults struggle with the challenges of insufficient foreign language competence in their personal and professional life, 27% claimed to provide some additional English training for their children outside of school.

The findings of Kyiv International Institute of Sociology align with the data collected by the Razumkov Center of Economic and Political Studies in 2023. According to the survey on how Ukrainian citizens would assess their own level of English proficiency, 43.8% of respondents do not know the language at all. Among 2,017 respondents interviewed aged 18 and older, only a small amount of 1.1% are fluent in English (Ukrinform 2023). The surveys revealed that only a rough proportion of 51–56% of participants presume to have some English knowledge or skills developed and only an approximate third can boast of some language mastery. Though self-assessment cannot be considered an objective means of language proficiency measuring, these findings provide some insights into an insufficient language training of adult population of Ukraine. Nonetheless, most Ukrainians are well aware that English has become a core life skill and are eager to improve it, especially after the Russian invasion in 2022.

While Ukraine was traditionally categorised as a low-proficiency country, it has seen an upward trend in English competence, particularly in urban areas and among younger generations (EF Education First 2024). The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI), a widely recognised measure of English-language skills, reflects Ukraine's significant shift from a "low" to a "moderate" proficiency band in the last decade (Appendix, Table 1). This leap corresponds to the upgrade from B1 to B2 level according to the CEFR where B2 is labelled as 'vantage' or 'upper-intermediate' level, or

an independent user, who in most general terms can

- understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialisation;
- interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party;
- produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue, giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

(Bolitho and West 2017)

The data, based on the EF EPI scores from 2013 to 2024, allows for a comparative analysis of Ukraine's progression within the global context of ELP and broader knowledge of educational reforms and sociopolitical developments in Ukraine. The scores reveal an earlier proficiency band fluctuating pattern with a general improvement in recent years starting from 2020 (EF Education First 2024). The initial years saw instability, as Ukraine worked to standardise English education, implement the "New Ukrainian School" reform and other English-centric policies. However, recent years have demonstrated progress, especially as state policies and educational reforms have increasingly emphasised English as crucial for Ukraine's European and global integration. Ukraine's overall improvement from 2013 to 2024 shows a commitment to raising English-language standards, indicating a foundation that can support further progress.

It is important to note that the EF Education First Index may be biased due to its self-selected test-taking population. Participants might not be fully representative as they are typically those interested in learning English, curious about their English skills, or those with Internet access, which excludes poorer, less educated individuals and those living in areas with limited or no connectivity. Nevertheless, since many researchers are among those motivated to improve their language skills, the data from the EF EPI can roughly reflect the ELP level of Ukraine's more educated population and its gradual improvement. While this level might be considered adequate, it may not be sufficient for success in academic settings. Against this background, we aim to better understand the current ELP levels in Ukrainian academia and how sufficient they are for successful international research dissemination.

To sum up, national language policies promoting Ukraine's European integration have increasingly emphasised ELP within the country's academic sphere. The declaration of 2016 as the Year of the English Language in Ukraine, coupled with the National Foreign Language Learning and Promotion Initiative, signalled a commitment to raising English standards. A presidential decree mandated ELP for certain university and civil service positions, leading the Ministry of Education and Science to establish procedures for awarding academic titles. These procedures require a minimum B2 ELP. Therefore, language policies in Ukraine directly regulate institutional English-language requirements for researchers by tying proficiency to academic advancement and specific job roles.

4.2 Ukrainian academics' English proficiency and perspectives to publish internationally

There is currently no specific research dedicated to assessing the ELP levels of Ukrainian academics. However, broader sociological data collected between December 2022 and January 2023 by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology provide useful insights into general language proficiency trends, which can help contextualise the situation within HEIs. This data, while not exclusively focused on academic researchers, includes HEI lecturers under the category of “educators and teachers”, making it relevant to our study.

The survey measured ELP using a unified integral indicator based on self-assessed skills in speaking, listening, writing and reading (KIIS 2023). The average English proficiency score for the entire adult Ukrainian population was 2.86 on a 10-point scale. In contrast, HEI lecturers had the highest reported score among professional groups, with an average of 4.09. This score was slightly higher than that of schoolteachers (4.01), government officials (3.89) and doctors (3.77). An approximate conversion to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) suggests that HEI lecturers, on average, fall around the A2 (Elementary) level. While Ukrainian HEI lecturers demonstrate higher English proficiency than other professional groups, their overall competency remains below what is typically required for international academic engagement.

A majority of HEI lecturers are multilingual, with 76.7% reporting proficiency in at least one foreign language. English predominates among them, with 58.1% identifying it as their primary foreign language – likely due to its widespread instruction in educational institutions and frequent use in academic and professional settings. Regarding English-language skills, 6.5% indicated they possessed only basic reading and writing abilities, 17.4% claimed to have speaking skills applicable in everyday or professional settings, and 34.8% reported proficiency in reading, writing and speaking in both contexts. This suggests that only about one-third of HEI lecturers feel confident using English in professional and academic interactions.

The survey also explored motivation for foreign language learning. Among HEI lecturers, 63% expressed both a desire and a need to improve their foreign language skills, while 26.1% had the desire but felt no necessity. Meanwhile, 10.9% reported neither the desire nor the need to learn a foreign language. The findings indicate that most educators recognise the importance of meeting the requirements of national language policies and are ready to improve their current proficiency levels.

The findings of the KIIS survey align with data from an empirical study

on the problems and prospects of Ukrainian scientists in publishing research in academic journals. The study (Fiialka 2018) highlights that proficiency in international scientific communication languages remains a significant barrier. Specifically, 54% of respondents reported relying on online translators when writing articles and abstracts in foreign languages, citing insufficient language proficiency and time constraints. This suggests that more than half of the surveyed researchers have not received adequate training in academic writing, which negatively affects not only their publishing success but also the quality of the research itself. Additionally, 72% of respondents acknowledged that preparing a high-quality article is impossible without engaging with scientific sources in internationally recognised languages (Fiialka 2018).

Despite this, linguistic challenges are not universally acknowledged as the primary concern. Some studies note that Slavic scientists, including Ukrainians, often prioritise research content over linguistic precision, sometimes neglecting nuances in academic writing (Yakhontova 2020). Among 296 scientists surveyed across various disciplines, 10% emphasised the importance of research findings and content over the language of publication (Fiialka 2018). This group argued that requiring proficiency in a foreign language discriminates against the Ukrainian language in scientific discourse. They also argued that research in the social sciences should remain accessible to a broad Ukrainian audience, “regardless of their knowledge of foreign languages” (Fiialka 2018: 135). While this perspective underscores the value of national language, it is difficult to ignore the dominant role of English as the *lingua franca* of academia. Notably, this view represents only a minority, as the study indicates that the majority of respondents recognise the necessity of foreign language proficiency for academic success.

These insights into the language-related aspects of English proficiency within the Ukrainian academic context are reinforced by a study on Ukrainian early-career scientists’ engagement with scholarly communication and publishing practices (Fiialka 2021). The respondents whose articles underwent blind peer review noted that 43.1% of positive review comments focused primarily on language and style, while in cases of negative reviews, language and style critiques were not primary but followed concerns about the abstract, methodology and conclusions, accounting for 33.6% of comments. This suggests two key insights: first, when article content satisfies the reviewers, they tend to find faults with the language and style, often to make at least some minor remarks. Second, when research fails to meet content-related expectations, language issues are not the primary focus, which complies with the principles of academic integrity. Even a strong linguistic proficiency cannot compensate

for weak research. However, when research is profound, a good command of English serves as a powerful tool for communicating ideas, gaining recognition and publishing findings in international journals.

A deeper and more focused examination of ELP in the Ukrainian academic landscape was conducted through the “English for Universities” project (2014–2016) by the British Council Ukraine in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The study focused on English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers, providing insights into the general ELP level within academia. Fifteen out of 198 universities existing at that time were selected based on geographic distribution, size and willingness to participate. They represented a mix of highly ranked and lower-profile institutions, ensuring a comprehensive and representative picture. Notably, the findings were consistent across institutions, indicating that the data reliably reflects broader trends in Ukrainian academia (Bolito 2017).

For our analysis, we exclusively used the research data on EMI instructors. We deliberately excluded ESP teachers as they often possess specialised linguistic training or philological backgrounds, making their proficiency levels unrepresentative of the broader academic community. EMI teachers, in contrast, come from diverse disciplines and reflect a more accurate picture of the English proficiency challenges in non-language-focused fields. Additionally, they represent the higher end of language competence, and their proficiency levels can serve as a benchmark for the English skills expected within the academic community, particularly in international and bilingual educational contexts.

Since the institutions with a higher proportion of EMI teachers were likely to have more staff with advanced English abilities, we used the project data to calculate the EMI instructors’ percentage and ranked the universities in the table according to this criteria (Appendix, Table 2). When EMI teaching is widespread within a university, it might reflect among other reasons institutional support for English-language use across various disciplines. Therefore, we also highlighted the incentives offered to those academics to see how these data correlate (Appendix, Table 2).

Our analysis revealed that EMI teachers constitute, on average, only 5.8% of total faculty, with a maximum of 12% per institution (Appendix, Table 2). This indicates that the number of faculty members who are presumably fluent in English remains low. The proportion of EMI teachers might also be a measure of an institution’s commitment to integrating English into its academic culture, which in turn can influence the broader faculty’s language proficiency and engagement with international academic standards.

A comparative analysis demonstrated that the percentage of EMI faculty was not necessarily higher in larger cities or institutions with more incentives, suggesting that factors beyond financial and professional benefits influence the adoption of EMI. While smaller cities like Poltava or Uzhhorod can boast of a higher proportion of EMI teachers, some universities in bigger cities like Odessa, Kharkiv and Lviv have much lower percentages even with a wider range of incentives including salary bonuses, opportunities to attend conferences, reduced teaching load and improved resourcing, etc. (Appendix, Table 2). Among other reasons, it might explain the fact that while there seems to be a broad national policy in place encouraging improvement in ELP levels and EMI practices in universities (Bolitho and West 2017), it is likely to be declaring rather than actively promoting them.

In terms of assessing ELP levels, the research data contain language testing results. 354 EMI educators from the project took the Aptis test. Results showed that 68% achieved CEFR B2 or higher, with only 22% reaching C1 (Bolitho and West 2017). Meanwhile, 25% scored at B1 and 7% at A2, levels insufficient for effective EMI, as even B2-level teachers, technically considered “upper-intermediate”, may face significant challenges having to explain complex concepts, facilitate dynamic classroom discussions, provide detailed feedback or respond spontaneously to students’ questions. It suggests that faculty outside EMI roles may face similar challenges and need language support.

While Aptis test scores revealed uneven proficiency levels among educators, with some scoring as high as C1 and as low as A1 in certain skills, self-reported confidence was notably high. The responses suggested that they have high levels of confidence in all language skills, although somewhat weaker in productive ones, namely speaking and writing. Thus, respondents were completely confident in the following proportions: 80% in reading academic books/journals; 74% in listening to lectures/presentations; 64% in writing academic papers/articles; 62% in giving lectures/presentations (Appendix, Table 3). Despite these high levels of confidence, 85% expressed a desire for further English training, acknowledging their ELP limitations (Bolitho and West 2017). Their primary motivations were attending international conferences and publishing research rather than increasing EMI teaching (Appendix, Table 4).

The motivation behind educators’ engagement with EMI demonstrates some patterns. The majority of surveyed teachers reported adopting EMI through personal initiative, often inspired by their experiences teaching or studying abroad or in response to student requests rather than institutional policy or financial support. Salary bonuses (\$17 monthly), where available, were minimal and did not serve as a primary incentive (Bolitho and West 2017).

In sum, to answer our research question to what extent the current ELP level of an average Ukrainian academic is sufficient for research publishing, we used sociological data collected by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, some empirical studies on the prospects of Ukrainian scientists in publishing research, findings of the “English for Universities” project. For our analysis, we utilised a unified integral indicator of ELP, comparative data across different professional groups, EMI lectures’ Aptis test results, self-assessment data of language skills and motivation data regarding language learning. All these provided useful insights into general language proficiency trends, which helped contextualise the current state and perspectives of Ukrainian academics to publish research internationally.

5. Discussion

National language policies regulating English proficiency among Ukrainian researchers were significantly influenced by European integration pursuit. The country’s 2005 admission to the Bologna Process prompted HEIs to prioritise English-language skills for better academic and research engagement. Following the 2014 EU Association Agreement, the government launched the National Foreign Language Learning and Promotion Initiative in June 2015, further reinforcing this focus.

The designation of 2016 as the Year of the English Language underscored national efforts to promote English proficiency in all spheres of social life. In December 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine approved the official Procedure for Awarding Academic Titles to Research and Academic Staff, which introduced English proficiency requirements. Subsequent reforms continued this trend, including the introduction of legislation supporting EMI, and the 2019 Conception of the English Language Development in universities, which determined specific ELP levels for undergraduate and postgraduate students of HEIs. Most recently, in 2023, the Ukrainian president introduced a bill establishing English as an official language for international communication, outlining its role in government, public affairs, science and education, further promoting English as a key competency for Ukrainian researchers.

These policies are reflected in the current ELP requirements, which mandate a minimum CEFR level of B1+ for bachelor’s students and B2 for master’s students, PhD candidates, associate professors, professorship seekers and heads of state higher education institutions (Appendix, Table 5). However, the uniform B2 threshold may fail to account for the varying linguistic demands

of senior academic roles, highlighting a need for more differentiated and role-specific proficiency standards.

The ELP of researchers is deeply intertwined with their academic literacy practices and experiences, directly shaping their ability to engage with scholarly literature and contribute meaningfully to their fields. Researchers with high ELP are undoubtedly better equipped to interpret complex texts, articulate their findings and participate in international academic dialogues, enhancing their scholarly impact. Nonetheless, despite the ongoing Englishisation of Ukrainian academia, multiple international and national studies indicate that the average Ukrainian researcher's English proficiency remains at a "moderate", "low" or "insufficient" level, placing it within the A2 to B2 range. Given this reality, it is crucial to question whether the mandated B2 proficiency level is truly sufficient for the essential academic task of research publishing. Since it demands compliance with strict academic conventions and a high degree of linguistic precision, achieving greater fluency at the C1 or C2 level would better equip researchers to navigate the complexities of academic communication.

While B2 users can communicate ideas clearly, construct coherent texts, and use general academic vocabulary effectively (Bolitho and West 2017), their writing often lacks the precision, complexity and stylistic sophistication expected in academic discourse. Difficulties with nuanced expression, formal tone and complex syntactical structures can hinder their ability to meet high scholarly standards. In contrast, C1 and C2 users demonstrate significantly greater linguistic control, with enhanced depth, broader vocabulary range and more subtlety in expression, according to CEFR (Council of Europe 2001). A C1 writer can produce well-structured, detailed texts on complex topics, using varied syntax and advanced academic vocabulary. While expecting near-native C2 proficiency may be unrealistic for researchers in an "outer circle" country, achieving a strong C1 level enables them to navigate diverse academic contexts. Ultimately, the ability to handle abstract and nuanced language is essential for research communication and scholarly publishing, making C1/C2 proficiency a valuable and strategic asset for researchers.

Despite the high level of motivation among Ukrainian researchers to advance their ELP (Appendix, Table 4), it is important to recognise that the transition from B2 to C1/C2 levels is highly challenging and time-consuming, even with adequate training and support. Achieving progress to more advanced CEFR levels requires at least 250 class contact hours (Appendix, Table 6). Furthermore, the so-called "language learning plateau" is especially relevant at the B2 level, particularly for those studying English for Academic and Publishing Purposes, who may feel they have stalled despite continued study.

Progress slows as learners must refine subtler aspects of language use, such as lexical precision, academic and professional nuances, which require intensive practice and specific, targeted learning strategies. Thus, teaching C1 requires additional scaffolding, structured practice and targeted feedback.

6. Conclusion

Though the ELP level of an average Ukrainian academic is estimated at B2 and generally considered sufficient to meet current national policy requirements, this benchmark may fall short of supporting the linguistic demands of international research communication and publishing. While B2 proficiency allows for general comprehension and communication, effective academic writing, particularly for publishing in international journals, demands the more advanced skills typically found at C1 or C2 levels. Therefore, existing policy frameworks should be carefully reconsidered and updated over time, ensuring they align with the evolving needs and realities faced by Ukrainian academics.

Additionally, developing consistent and comprehensive ELP assessment procedures across Ukrainian HEIs could help establish a clear benchmark for continuous professional development. Addressing this mismatch between policy and practice and implementing flexible, discipline-specific language standards will ensure Ukrainian researchers are equipped with the necessary ELP.

Based on these findings, we suggest the following directions for further studies and policy development: conducting a focused language needs analysis to identify typical skills gaps among Ukrainian researchers; developing tailored resources that address the nuanced language needs across academic domains; and creating targeted English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Publication Purposes (EPP) support programmes, empowering Ukrainian scholars to engage more effectively with international academic community.

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Résumé

Cette étude examine comment les politiques linguistiques nationales en Ukraine influencent les exigences de compétence en anglais pour les universitaires, et évalue si leurs niveaux linguistiques actuels permettent réellement la publication dans des revues internationales. À partir de l'analyse de documents politiques, de données d'enquêtes sociologiques et d'études empiriques, cet article explore les exigences institutionnelles en matière de compétence en anglais et leur adéquation avec les besoins des chercheurs. Les résultats montrent que, bien que l'Ukraine ait mis en place des politiques ambitieuses pour promouvoir l'anglais dans l'enseignement supérieur, notamment l'exigence du niveau B2 pour la plupart des diplômes et postes académiques, le niveau moyen des chercheurs ukrainiens se situe entre A2 et B2. Ce décalage entre les exigences officielles et les compétences réelles nuit considérablement à leur capacité de publier au niveau international. L'analyse révèle que, si le niveau B2 permet une communication académique de base, la publication scientifique réussie nécessite des compétences de niveau C1/C2 pour maîtriser les subtilités du discours académique international. L'étude souligne que l'exigence uniforme du niveau B2 pour tous les postes ne tient pas compte des besoins linguistiques spécifiques selon les disciplines. Les résultats mettent également en lumière la nécessité d'élaborer des standards nationaux cohérents pour l'évaluation de la compétence linguistique, ainsi que d'adopter des exigences différenciées, adaptées aux disciplines. Cette recherche peut nourrir une révision des politiques en vue de programmes d'appui

linguistique ciblés. Des recherches futures devraient porter sur une analyse approfondie des besoins linguistiques dans les différentes disciplines, la création de ressources spécifiques au domaine, et des dispositifs d'accompagnement. Cela permettrait aux institutions de mieux soutenir les chercheurs ukrainiens dans leur intégration aux normes académiques internationales et de renforcer leur participation au dialogue scientifique mondial.

Mots clés: Ukraine, politique linguistique, compétence en anglais, établissement d'enseignement supérieur, enseignement en anglais, publication scientifique

Appendix

Table 1. EF EPI ranking for Ukraine (based on EF 2013–2024 reports)

Year	EF EPI score	EF EPI annual change	Proficiency band	Country's rank	Total number of countries
2013	53.09		moderate	27	60
2014	48.50	- 4.41	low	44	63
2015	52.61	+4.11	moderate	34	70
2016	50.62	- 1.99	low	41	72
2017	50.91	+ 0.29	low	47	80
2018	52.86	+1.95	moderate	43	88
2019	52.13	- 0.73	low	49	100
2020	506*	+ 5 *	moderate	44	100
2021	525*	+ 19*	moderate	40	112
2022	539*	+ 16*	moderate	35	111
2023	530*	-9*	moderate	45	113
2024	535*	+5*	moderate	40	116

*According to a new scale introduced

Table 2. University ranking according to EMI instructors' ratio and academic incentives (based on Bolitho and West 2017)

#	University name	Total academic staff	EMI teachers	% EMI of total	Strategies for EMI institutional support
1.	Vasyl Stus Donetsk National University	353	40	11.34	- teaching staff are offered English-teaching courses; - academic staff are encouraged to use the opportunity for academic staff mobility within the Erasmus+ Programme; - EMI teachers are awarded financially for an EMI course design; - EMI teachers receive monthly bonus payments for the design and delivery of Master's programmes.
2.	Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv	3,000	250	8.3	- academic and administrative staff are offered free English-language courses; - EMI and ESP teachers are encouraged to take continuing professional development (CPD) and/or academic staff exchange programmes at partner universities.
3.	Poltava National Technical Yuri Kondratyuk University	511	38	7.4	EMI teachers are offered free English-language courses at the Foreign Language Centre
4.	National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"	2,980	200	6.7	- EMI lecturers receive bonus points in the University Teaching Staff Ranking System for delivering specialised courses and designing materials in English; - academic staff are offered free online English-language courses.
5.	State University "Uzhhorod National University"	1,275	74	5.8	- EMI and ESP teachers are encouraged to take the British Council CPD programmes; - English-language courses are offered to the academic staff and students; - academic staff are encouraged to participate in training programmes abroad.
6.	Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University	938	52	5.5	- CPD policy for ESP and EMI teachers has been developed and implemented; - teaching staff are encouraged to participate in international academic exchange programmes; - EMI teachers are offered ninety hours "English for academics" free language course.

#	University name	Total academic staff	EMI teachers	% EMI of total	Strategies for EMI institutional support
7.	Zaporizhia National Technical University	800	40	5	- EMI teachers are offered 10% reduction of classroom teaching hours; 70% of Aptis costs are reimbursed for ESP and EMI teachers; - ESP and EMI teachers receive 100% reimbursement of travel expenses for attending British Council courses; - EMI teachers are offered English-language courses at home university.
8.	National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute"	1,484	65	4.4	- the university staff and students are offered English-language courses at a discount rate; 15% monthly salary bonus is awarded to the staff teaching EMI courses; - subject teachers receive additional payment for delivering EMI course remotely.
9.	State Higher Educational Institution "National Mining University"	755	32	4.2	- teaching staff are encouraged to join academic exchange programmes and take academic mobility opportunities; - co-operation with international partner universities, joint projects and international events are promoted and facilitated by the administration.
10.	Chernihiv National University of Technology	387	15	3.9	EMI teachers are paid 10% monthly bonus and offered free English-language courses at the university
11.	State Institution "Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University" (LNU)	332	9	2.7	- teaching staff are offered ESP courses; - ESP and EMI teachers are encouraged to take the British Council CPD courses.
12.	Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University	1,316	32	2.4	- teaching staff are offered free English-language courses at the University Linguistic Centre; - a monthly salary bonus of 5–15% is awarded for teaching EMI courses.

#	University name	Total academic staff	EMI teachers	% EMI of total	Strategies for EMI institutional support
13.	Lviv Polytechnic National University	2,081	43	2.1	• a 15% monthly bonus is awarded for teaching EMI courses and conducting research in English; • a cash bonus is granted to teachers and students who obtain an international language proficiency certificate at B2–C1 levels.
14.	Ternopil Ivan Puluj National Technical University	425	90	2.1	• None
15.	Cherkasy State Technological University	398	-	0	• The academic staff are offered free English-language courses.
Total		17,035	980	5.8	

Table 3. EMI instructors' language skills self-assessment (Bolitho and West 2017)

#	Academic English-language skill	Completely confident	Confident most of the time
1.	Giving lectures/presentations	62%	34%
2.	Listening to lectures/presentations	74%	25%
3.	Reading academic books/journals	80%	20%
4.	Writing academic papers/articles	64%	34%

Table 4. Motivation to improve English-language skills (Bolitho and West 2017)

Rank	Reason	Average
1.	Publish papers/articles	97%
2.	Go to international conferences	95%
3.	Teach more classes in English	94%
4.	Travel overseas	82%
5.	Go to work in overseas university	79%
6.	Study overseas	65%

Table 5. National ELP requirements to academic degrees and positions in Ukraine (2025)

Academic degree, position	CEFR ELP level required
Bachelor	B1+
Master	B2
PhD student	B2
Associate professorship/professorship seeker	B2
Head of state HEI	B2

Table 6. Hours required to progress from one CEFR level to another (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2005)

Entry level/Target level	A2	B1	B2	C1
A1	200 hours	400 hours	600 hours	850 hours
A2		200 hours	400 hours	650 hours
B1			200 hours	450 hours
B2				250 hours