

Strengthening English Language Status in Ukraine: Policy Shift Towards Global Integration

Криворізький національний університет
Kryvyi Rih National University

Анотація У статті проаналізовано нову мовну політику України щодо підвищення статусу англійської мови як мови міжнародного спілкування. Особливу увагу приділено законодавчим змінам, ролі англійської мови в освіті, державному управлінні та євроінтеграційних прагненнях України.

Ключові слова англійська мова, мовна політика, міжнародна комунікація, освіта, євроінтеграція

Abstract The article examines Ukraine's recent language policy aimed at elevating English as a language of international communication. It focuses on legislative changes, the role of English in education, public administration, and the country's European integration strategy.

Keywords English language, language policy, international communication, education, European integration

Introduction

Since 2022, Ukraine has initiated a comprehensive reform of its language policy, significantly advancing the status of English within national legislation and public life. This policy shift, culminating in the adoption of Bill No. 9432 in June 2024, reflects Ukraine's strategic orientation toward European integration and the global knowledge economy. This paper explores the main directions of the reform, its sociolinguistic rationale, legal foundations, and potential implications for language planning, education, and administrative practices. The analysis is framed within the context of language policy studies and sociopolitical transformation in post-Soviet states.

Literature Review and Discussion

Language policy serves as a powerful instrument of national identity construction, soft power, and global alignment [1]. For post-Soviet Ukraine, English has increasingly become a symbol of internationalism, modernity, and Euro-Atlantic integration. Amidst the ongoing geopolitical realignment and the Russian invasion since 2022, Ukraine's language landscape has undergone rapid shifts. While the Ukrainian language remains constitutionally protected and promoted, English has been redefined as a tool for external communication and modernization.

The formalization of English as a language of international communication in 2024 represents a paradigmatic shift in Ukrainian language planning. This paper analyzes the key components of this legislative and policy development, identifying its strategic goals, implementation mechanisms, and broader implications for public administration and education.

The enactment of Bill No. 9432 in June 2024 by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy introduced a legislative framework that elevates English to a new functional status in Ukraine. The law designates English as an official language of international communication, thereby embedding it within the legal architecture of state governance, education, and service provision.

The institutionalization of English extends to several domains:

- **Public Administration:** English proficiency is now mandatory for top-tier civil servants, including heads of local state administrations, prosecutors, tax and customs officials, and military officers of specific ranks.
- **Education and Science:** Leaders and academic personnel in higher education and research institutions are required to demonstrate English proficiency.
- **Healthcare:** Administrative heads of medical institutions are included in the list of officials subject to language requirements [2].

The implementation timeline provides a gradual approach: two years after the cessation of martial law for high-level officials, and four years for others. This phased model aligns with language policy best practices, allowing for capacity-building, training, and institutional adaptation [3].

Education is a cornerstone of the language reform. While English has long been a compulsory subject in Ukrainian schools, the new policy emphasizes early language acquisition, extending English instruction to the preschool level. This aligns with empirical evidence from psycholinguistics indicating the benefits of early bilingualism for cognitive flexibility and later academic success [4].

Moreover, higher education institutions are expected to increase English-medium instruction (EMI), participate in international academic mobility programs, and ensure that websites and promotional materials are available in both Ukrainian and English. These measures aim to raise Ukraine's academic visibility and competitiveness within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The policy can be interpreted as a response to global trends emphasizing English as the lingua franca of science, diplomacy, and technology. It also resonates with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which the government uses as a standard for language certification. Civil servants who achieve B2 level proficiency are now eligible for a 10% salary bonus, creating financial motivation for language acquisition.

The legislative framework also mandates the use of English in key public spheres, including:

- Government websites and official digital platforms
- Emergency services and border control
- Transport, tourism, and cultural sectors
- Scientific institutions and academic publishing

One noteworthy aspect is the state's support for English-language cinema, promoting subtitling over dubbing. This reflects a dual cultural-linguistic goal: enhancing English listening skills among the population while maintaining Ukrainian as the primary visual text. These efforts are not only educational but also cultural, aiming to familiarize citizens with English-language media and reduce language barriers in international communication.

The reconfiguration of Ukraine's language policy is deeply entwined with its postcolonial and geopolitical trajectory. By strengthening the role of English, Ukraine symbolically distances itself from the legacy of Russian linguistic dominance and asserts a Western-oriented identity. In this sense, language policy becomes a form of soft resistance and alignment, aligning Ukraine with European Union norms and global democratic institutions [5].

At the same time, the policy raises practical challenges, including regional disparities in English proficiency, teacher training needs, and the risk of overburdening civil servants. Successful implementation will require strategic investment in language education infrastructure, digital learning tools, and standardized testing systems.

Conclusion

Ukraine's decision to formalize English as a language of international communication represents a profound shift in national language planning, with far-reaching implications for governance, education, and international engagement. Rooted in the broader context of European integration and global competitiveness, this policy positions English not as a rival to Ukrainian but as a complementary tool for global connectivity. The success of the initiative will depend on sustained institutional support, equitable access to language learning, and continuous assessment of outcomes.

References

1. Spolsky B. Language Policy. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004. – 310 p.
2. Zotova-Sadylo O. English as a bridge language in education, cultural diplomacy and economic integration of Ukraine into the European community. *Розширюючи обрії: зб. тез двадцятого міжнар. форуму студ. і молодих учених*, 21 – 25 квітня 2025 р., м. Дніпро/ за ред. Л.В. Павленко; М-во освіти і науки України; Дніпровська політехніка. – Д.: ДП, 2025. – С. 220-223
3. Shohamy E. Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches. – London : Routledge, 2006. – 208 p.
DOI: [10.4324/9780203387962](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203387962)
4. Bialystok E. Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2001. – 276 p.
5. Pavlenko A. Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries: Language Revival, Language Removal, and Sociolinguistic Theory // *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. – 2008. – Vol. 11, № 3–4. – P. 275–314.

Зотова-Садило Олена Юрївна – кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент кафедри іноземних мов Криворізького національного університету, Кривий Ріг, e-mail: olenazotova_sadylo@knu.edu.ua

Соколов Роман – студент групи KI- 24 факультету Інформаційних технологій Криворізького національного університету, e-mail: sokol0288@gmail.com

Zotova-Sadylo Olena– PhD, Associated Professor at Foreign Language Department, Kryvyi Rih National University, e-mail: olenazotova_sadylo@knu.edu.ua

Sokolov Roman – a student of the group KI-24 of IT Department at Kryvyi Rih National University, Kryvyi Rih, e-mail: sokol0288@gmail.com