

**KAPITEL 6 / CHAPTER 6 ⁶****TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN AGGREGATED SMALL
ACADEMIC GROUPS OF DIFFERENT SPECIALITIES AS A PART OF
STRUCTURAL CONSOLIDATION WITHIN UKRAINIAN EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEM****DOI: 10.30890/2709-2313.2024-35-00-014****Introduction**

Education remains a determining factor of the future, because the state of the country mainly depends on it. It is not only a phenomenon that shapes the value orientation of students, but also a key resource in such areas as innovative economy, social cohesion and the development of its social culture.

The existential challenges of war and ways to overcome them are one of the pressing issues for modern Ukrainian education. With the beginning of the anti-terrorist operation, back in 2014, many educational institutions in the eastern part of the country found themselves in special circumstances, in which they operated online and connected to academic mobility programs offered by the rear regions. Other educational institutions adapted to the emergency situation during the 2020 pandemic, when classes began to be held in an asynchronous format. A new wave of unforeseen difficulties awaited educators after a full-scale invasion, when the country, hardened in the flames of hostilities, was forced to fight for every day of its existence.

6.1. The prospects for Ukrainian universities in after-war period

Despite the difficult circumstances, the scientific and pedagogical community did not wait for better times and did not shift the main emphases and priorities, but found effective methods and techniques, new formats, special didactic units, did not lose their quality and usefulness. Universities, in particular, continued to fulfil their statutory

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functions of forming the national elite of Ukraine, ensuring the training of highly qualified specialists who integrate the culture of knowledge, academic and professional communication, creativity and scientific competencies.

Any crises contribute to transformation, which will certainly strengthen each participant in the process. If we talk about the prospects for universities in the next 5-20 years, then in the post-war period, despite the good adaptation of the system in terms of distance or blended learning, there will be a gradual return to the offline format. There are a number of points that need to be overcome or improved to preserve technical development and scientific potential. In addition to introducing creative programs and the widespread use of computer technologies, developing international cooperation, and other interesting and productive aspects, such as connecting practical cases and building practical interaction between different sectors of society, higher education institutions need to prepare for new conditions.

6.2. The ways to achieve the financial sustainability of universities

According to Vasyl Karpusha, rector of Sumy State University, “the basis of a successful university is its financial condition”: “As a border university, we understand perfectly well the risks of this year’s admission campaign. One of the main sources of our income is scientific and technical activity. We want to increase the volume of scientific research. Foreign students used to give us 26% of income, but now we have lost this source of income” [1].

“The network of universities today is excessive and overwhelming for Ukraine,” notes Volodymyr Bakhrushyn, a member of the National Team of Experts on Higher Education Reform. “In 1991, there were less than 150 higher education institutions, and there were more students than now. As of the beginning of 2021, we had 281 institutions. What is the criterion for optimizing and efficiency of the network is still unclear. We can use approaches that exist in the world. For example, structuring institutions: research universities, higher schools, and so on. These are different types



of institutions that have different conditions, different funding, requirements, etc. It is necessary not only to reduce the number of institutions, but to structure the system” [1].

The educator suggests using the European idea of creating internal (national) and external (international) university alliances, partnerships for cooperation – centers with joint educational programs, collective use of equipment, etc. Interaction should take place at different levels - from teaching staff to students and administration. By uniting with each other, universities will interact more actively with local communities. Such educational institutions not only train specialists for the labor market, but also become part of social and economic initiatives in their regions through participation in project offices that coordinate cooperation between business, government and communities.

What other fundamental changes does the education system as a whole need? The President of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Serhiy Kvit, believes that higher education should move towards comprehensive autonomy: “Universities should be able to understand for themselves where and how to spend [funds]. The state should open up opportunities for universities to receive resources from various sources. Only the activity, responsibility and reputation of the universities themselves should be the key to their development” [2].

6.3. An upcoming structural consolidation within Ukrainian educational system

In addition to financial aspects, another important challenge for Ukrainian universities is the preservation of human capital. The war caused a significant migration of students and scientists abroad, which created a threat to the future scientific potential of the country. The number of students is also decreasing due to the demographic crisis, which will become more complicated in the coming years. The unfavourable socio-demographic situation in the country has led to a significant decrease in the number of secondary school graduates – potential applicants to Ukrainian universities.

According to Serhiy Babak, the head of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine



Committee on Education, Science and Innovation, we cannot avoid merging and unifying universities: “For example, one of the most authoritative world rankings, QS, considers universities with less than 5 thousand students to be micro-universities. Micro. The world ranking does not see them. If you look at the higher education system of Ukraine, 67% of universities, two thirds, have less than five thousand students. Of the 200 universities that are subordinate to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, in addition to the military and the Ministry of Internal Affairs systems, there are 50 universities that are funded by the state and have less than a thousand children studying there” [2].

In Europe, it's a usual process in which most higher education institutions that are small and medium sized establishments, have been merged into larger clusters with “umbrella institutions” (universities with a considerably larger demographic size) in a drive to increase visibility and competitiveness. The following graph in a Figure 1 highlights a breakdown of mergers and clusters by the number of institutions involved:

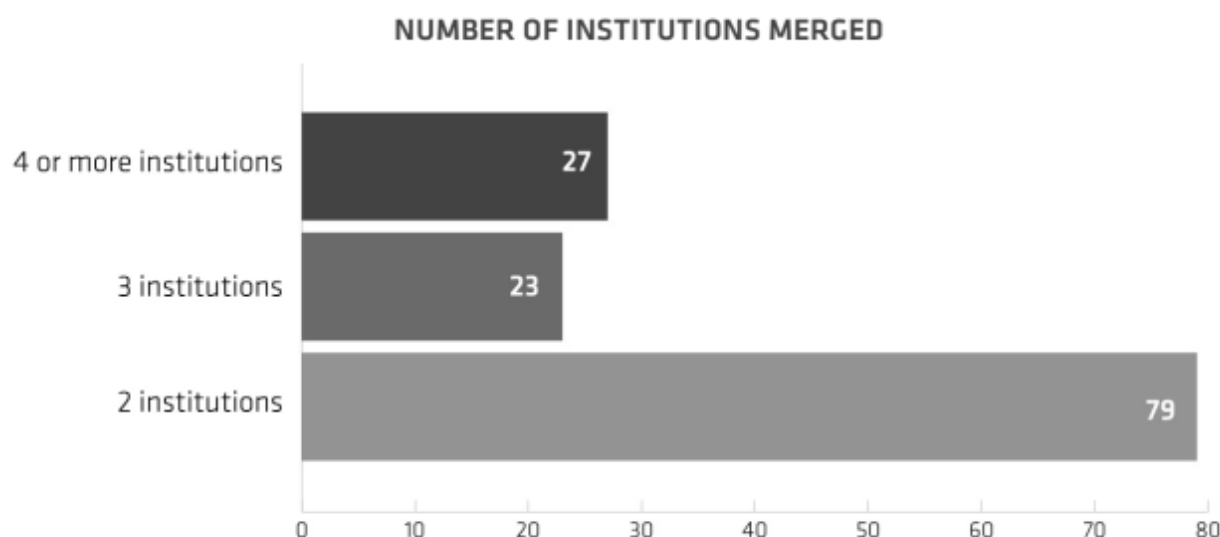


Figure 1 – Mergers and clusters by the number of institutions involved

Source: [4, p. 5]



6.4. Providing a balanced distribution of the course academic load

A long journey begins with small gradual steps, and today educators need to think about unifying the contingent of higher education institutions. To a large extent, this applies to faculties, and at the macro level – the activities of academic groups. In the new edition of the regulations on planning and accounting, and balanced distribution of the course academic load, most universities include mandatory recommendations on teaching the same academic disciplines under different educational programs with the same number of lecture hours – in this case, academic groups of applicants are combined into one lecture stream. As for foreign language – a discipline with an emphasis on the formation of practical professional communicative competencies – and other disciplines, which provide not lecture, but practical classes, and which cover all faculties and all groups, including small ones in terms of the number of people, for them "in order to optimize university resources" it is recommended to "unite small groups for practical (seminar, laboratory) classes, provided that the content is similar and the number of classroom hours is commensurate" [3, p. 7].

The “Regulations on planning and accounting for educational and main types of methodological, scientific, organizational and career guidance work of scientific and pedagogical workers of SBTU” define the maximum number of applicants for the concept of a small group. The standards vary for different specialties and according to a relevant education or research programme at various levels of higher education. In general, this can be a group with a number of less than 14, 10 or even 5 people (as it is mentioned in Table 1).

Educational classes in such groups are held according to the schedule, but there is a significant nuance – the time norm. For small groups, 10-20% of the total amount of time is allocated for studying the discipline. That is, the number of hours of educational classes is reduced while maintaining the total amount of disciplines in ECTS credits. In order to avoid educational losses, not to increase the number of hours of independent work and to maintain the quality of educational indicators (by quality we mean not only the points received by education seekers, but the optimal functioning of the



Table 1 - Standards for defining a small group

Code of speciality	Name of speciality	Number of higher education applicants to determine a small group		
		First (Bachelor) level	Second (Master) level 50%	Third (Educational and Research/ Educational and Creative) level
191	Architecture and Urban Planning	less than 5	less than 5	less than 3
123	Computer Engineering	less than 10	less than 5	
125	Cybersecurity			
174 (151)	Automation and computer-integrated technologies			
211	Veterinary Medicine			
212	Veterinary Hygiene, Sanitation and Expertise			
091	Biology	less than 11	less than 6	
131	Applied Mechanics			
133	Sectoral engineering			
141	Electric power engineering, electrical engineering and electromechanics			
142	Energy engineering			
163	Biomedical Engineering			
274	Road transport			
275	Transport technologies			
015	Professional Education	less than 12	less than 6	
101	Ecology			
103	Science about the Earth			
162	Biotechnology and Bioengineering			
181	Food Technology			
187	Woodworking and furniture technologies			
192	Construction and Civil Engineering			
193	Geodesy and land management			
201	Water Bioresources and Aquaculture			
202	Protection and quarantine of plants			
203	Horticulture, fruit and vegetable growing and viticulture			
204	Technology of production and processing of animal husbandry products			
205	Forestry			
206	Landscape Gardening			
207	Aquatic Bioresources and aquaculture			
208	Agroengineering			
051	Economics	less than 13	less than 7	
054	Sociology			



071	Accounting and Taxation			
072	Finance, banking, insurance and stock market			
073	Management			
075	Marketing			
076	Entrepreneurship, trade and exchange activity			
081	Law			
241	Hotel and restaurant business			
281	Public Administration and Business Management			
292	International economic relations			
242	Tourism and recreation	less than 14	less than 7	

Source: [5, p. 6]

didactic process, the core of which is the result-oriented basis and competency-oriented content, educational technologies, control and diagnostic measures, as well as forms of interaction between subjects of the educational process), these groups should be combined. If students master individual educational components as part of a consolidated group (consolidated stream) and the number of students in them meets the established standards, the full number of hours of practical classes will be planned.

6.5. Educational aggregation strategies

We propose to call such a process educational aggregation. Aggregation or aggregation (the word comes from the Latin *aggregatio* – "joining") is the combination of elements into one system.

In order for educational aggregation to be as effective as possible, it is necessary to form its theoretical mechanism and develop criteria for unification. We recommend the following provisions:

1. For conducting seminar and practical (laboratory) classes, uniting into consolidated groups (up to 30 people) is possible provided that the same number of training hours are spent.

2. To achieve program learning outcomes, aggregation should occur according to



the industry principle, which includes a group of related specialties in which professional training is carried out. That is, special (professional, subject) competencies should be common – those that directly determine the specificity (branch of knowledge/subject area/specialty) of the educational program and the qualification of the graduate, ensuring the individuality of each educational program. According to this principle, classes can be held for students of economic specialties or applicants for education in classical engineering IT specialties, etc.

3. To combine groups of unrelated specialties, educational aggregation is possible for disciplines with the same name and a similar set of thematic sections (this can be, for example, a business foreign language). Here it would be appropriate to use such a descriptor of the National Qualifications Framework as general competencies - that is, universal, those that do not depend on the subject area, but are important for the successful further professional and social activities of a higher education applicant in various fields and for his personal development.

6.6. Peculiarities of teaching foreign languages in aggregated academic groups

Thus, a student audience consisting of several specialties is a current reality of university life. Teachers, therefore, face the issues of interaction with representatives of different specialties in the conditions of one classroom or online lesson. The specialist needs to deal with questions of competent organization of the English (or other foreign language) lesson taking into account the "dialogue of professions" implemented in it, methodological support of the practical lesson, selection of material for work.

In addition to the above-mentioned problematic issues that inevitably arise for teachers of foreign languages, the diversity of students is the condition that makes it possible to implement the tasks of developing interprofessional communication, friendship, and exchange of professional experience.

As practice shows, group and individual forms of work are used in



“interprofessional” student audience, including the project method, which is widespread in science. An educational project is a set of exploratory research carried out by students independently with the aim of finding a practical or theoretical solution to a significant problem. Presenting their projects students often actively engage in dialogue about the basics and general terms of their specialties, which can become a powerful technique in the arsenal of a foreign language teacher, especially at the stage of communicative work during a lesson.

In the digital age, interactive teaching methods are becoming increasingly important. They make the language learning process not only more effective, but also more fun, which is especially important when working with students affected by war.

Modern multimedia resources, such as audio and video, enrich the learning process, making it more dynamic and interactive. Videos with subtitles, podcasts, and audiobooks in foreign languages allow students not only to listen and repeat phrases, but also to see the text, which improves understanding and memorization.

The introduction and use of digital technologies, including AI and augmented reality (AR), in the learning process is in line with the state policy of digitalization of the education system. Among the compelling advantages of virtual reality as an educational technology (safety, focus on the subject of study, automation of processes, explicitness, interactivity) the central place is occupied by immersion – the involvement of the user in the virtual environment used for overcoming the language barrier with the help of visualization of practice.

Apps and websites an aggregated group can deal with are numerous. Among them the most considerable are the educational platform Engage VR, Virtual Speech (an application that focuses on professional and general business English), a multiplayer game VRChat, Language Lab – a free 3D environment where students will be chatting with virtual characters, FullDive that transforms select videos from YouTube, Facebook into immersive 3D environments, etc.



Conclusions

The ways to overcome the main existential challenges and managing new responsibilities of after-war period involve different issues for optimizing modern Ukrainian higher education as it is a part of socio-economic life. An upcoming structural consolidation will lead to the merging of universities due to the range of factors. It results in adaptation of new organizational methods. One of them is aggregation of small academic groups into larger units.

Conducting foreign languages classes in groups united by the method of educational aggregation requires the use of innovative approaches and methods that allow for real-time transformation. All this necessitates the search for new constructive ideas to solve the problem of optimizing and intensifying the study of foreign languages, improving the level of language and speech training of future specialists.

The proposed interactive technologies and their use in the educational process for the purpose of forming students' professional competencies, – certainly have an important scientific and practical significance for improving the professional training of students. After all, the full range of skills and competencies that they gain at this key moment in their lives will make them successful individuals, able to easily adapt to a constantly changing world.