

UDC 378.147:81'243:614.2:005.32

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/eddiscourses/2026-3-11>

TEACHING PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH TO UKRAINIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS DURING WARTIME: BETWEEN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Kolomiets Tetiana Vyacheslavivna,

PhD, Associate Professor,

Associate Professor at the Department of Language Studies,

Bogomolets National Medical University

ORCID: 0000-0002-5335-7789

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally disrupted all spheres of national life, including higher education. Medical universities, as institutions at the intersection of science, care, and ethics, faced the urgent challenge of maintaining educational quality under conditions of psychological stress, displacement, and material scarcity. Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to medical students during wartime requires far more than transferring linguistic knowledge – it demands a holistic approach that integrates emotional resilience, adaptability, and intercultural competence.

This article explores the pedagogical, emotional, and ethical dimensions of teaching professional English in Ukrainian medical universities during the ongoing war. It identifies key strategies that enable educators to support both the academic and psychological well-being of students while fostering their professional identity and global communication skills.

The study draws on analysis of ESP educators' pedagogical experience at Ukrainian medical universities (2022–2024), generalisation of trauma-informed pedagogy practices, digital teaching tools, and reflective methods. Theoretical analysis, descriptive method, and pedagogical modelling were employed.

Five key wartime challenges were identified: air raids and blackouts (89% of educators affected), psychological stress (81%), forced displacement (67%), cognitive overload (75%), and unequal technology access (54%). Effective adaptation strategies include hybrid/asynchronous learning (34% of ESP practices), trauma-informed pedagogy (22%), task-based learning (20%), reflective writing (13%), and digital tools including AI (11%). The ESP classroom was found to function as a psychosocial stabilisation space. An original course «English for Healthcare Communication in Crisis Contexts» achieved a successful completion rate above 90%.

Teaching professional English during wartime transcends traditional linguistic education. It is a human-centred mission that integrates language learning with emotional healing and global citizenship. The experience of Ukrainian educators offers innovative pedagogical models that enrich global educational practice and demonstrate that teaching can endure and transform even amid destruction.

Key words: English for Medical Purposes, wartime education, emotional resilience, trauma-informed pedagogy, Ukrainian medical students, hybrid learning, emotional intelligence, soft skills.

Коломієць Тетяна. Викладання професійної англійської мови студентам-медикам України в умовах воєнного стану: між мовним навчанням та емоційною стійкістю

Повномасштабне вторгнення Росії в Україну у 2022 р. докорінно змінило умови провадження вищої освіти. Викладання ESP (англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням) в умовах воєнного стану набуло нових смислів, що виходять за межі традиційного формування мовної компетентності.

Стаття досліджує педагогічні, емоційні та етичні виміри викладання професійної англійської мови у медичних університетах України та ідентифікує стратегії підтримки академічного й психологічного добробуту студентів.

Дослідження ґрунтується на аналізі досвіду ESP-викладачів медичних університетів України (2022–2024), узагальненні практик травма-інформованої педагогіки, цифрових інструментів та рефлексивних методів навчання. Застосовано теоретичний аналіз, описовий метод та педагогічне моделювання.

Визначено п'ять ключових викликів: повітряні тривоги та знеструмлення (89%), психологічний стрес (81%), вимушене переміщення (67%), когнітивне перевантаження (75%), нерівний доступ до технологій (54%). Провідні стратегії: гібридне навчання (34%), травма-інформована педагогіка (22%), навчання на основі завдань (20%), рефлексивне письмо (13%), цифрові інструменти та ШІ (11%).

Викладання англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням у воєнний час є людиноцентрованою місією, що інтегрує мовне навчання з емоційним зіцненням і глобальним громадянством.

Ключові слова: англійська мова для медичних цілей, освіта в умовах воєнного стану, емоційна стійкість, травма-інформована педагогіка, студенти-медики, гібридне навчання, емоційний інтелект, м'які навички.



Introduction. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 profoundly reshaped the landscape of higher education. Universities that once functioned as stable academic environments were forced to relocate, digitise, or partially suspend operations. Students and faculty experienced displacement, trauma, and the loss of normal social interaction. In this context, language education, especially English for Medical Purposes (EMP), acquired a new and deeper significance.

Traditionally, the goal of EMP is to prepare medical students to communicate effectively in clinical and academic settings, to read and produce scientific texts, and to engage with the international medical community [1]. Yet under wartime conditions, teaching professional English is also an act of psychological care, cultural resilience, and resistance to despair. For many students, English classes became safe, supportive spaces where they could restore a sense of connection and purpose amid uncertainty.

This article argues that teaching professional English during wartime is not only about linguistic competence but also about emotional endurance and collective recovery. It examines how Ukrainian ESP educators integrate trauma-informed teaching methods, digital tools, and reflective practices to support students' academic and emotional needs, thereby contributing to both pedagogical innovation and national resilience.

Literature Review. Before 2022, Ukrainian medical universities steadily integrated ESP into their curricula, aligning with European standards through the Bologna Process and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) [2]. Teaching methods focused on reading comprehension, case studies, doctor-patient dialogues, and the development of research communication skills.

The full-scale war radically disrupted this progress. Frequent air raids, blackouts, and displacement forced institutions into emergency remote teaching. Classes were often conducted from bomb shelters or during power outages. Teachers and students alike experienced anxiety, fatigue, and grief [3; 4]. The need for educational continuity demanded unprecedented flexibility and empathy from educators.

While the war imposed immense challenges, it also accelerated digital transformation. Learning management systems (Moodle, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams) became lifelines for maintaining academic contact. Many educators adopted hybrid learning models, combining synchronous online meetings with asynchronous tasks [4]. This digital flexibility also expanded access to international

resources: open-access journals, webinars, and online conferences, that allowed Ukrainian medical students to remain engaged with global academic discourse even under siege conditions.

Research in educational psychology demonstrates that language learning involves emotional processes such as motivation, confidence, and empathy [5]. Under extreme stress, these affective factors become central. Effective ESP instruction must therefore integrate emotional literacy: teaching students how to express feelings, provide peer support, and manage anxiety in English [3; 6].

Materials and Methods. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design based on: theoretical analysis of scientific literature (over 40 publications indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar); descriptive method for systematising pedagogical practices; pedagogical modelling for designing an effective ESP framework under crisis conditions; and generalisation of the original author course «English for Healthcare Communication in Crisis Contexts» (2023–2024, $n > 120$ students, years 1–3 of medical study).

Qualitative data on challenges and strategies were obtained from reflective educator reports, focus-group discussions, and student questionnaires ($n = 87$). Quantitative indicators (percentage coverage of challenges and strategies) were synthesised from open pedagogical research and Ukrainian Ministry of Education reports for the corresponding period. The critical significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results. The ESP classroom as a psychosocial space. In wartime, the language classroom becomes more than an educational site: it transforms into a psychosocial space of stability [4]. Students frequently described English classes as moments of «normal life» amid chaos. This emotional function aligns with trauma psychology, which highlights the importance of structure, predictability, and connection for recovery. Teachers thus perform dual roles: as linguistic facilitators and as informal counsellors who help students regulate emotions and find meaning through language. Simple routines, such as greetings, reflective check-ins, collaborative warm-ups can provide grounding and continuity [6].

A trauma-informed approach acknowledges that both students and teachers may be experiencing trauma. Its principles, such as safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and choice guide the design of wartime ESP courses [7]. Instructors applied these principles by: avoiding overly distressing topics and providing content warnings; allowing flexible deadlines and participation modes; encouraging reflective writing where students use English as a

meaning-making tool; creating opportunities for peer empathy through group projects and storytelling sessions focused on resilience.

Despite constraints, Ukrainian ESP educators have maintained task-based learning to ensure active engagement [8]. Tasks such as simulated doctor-patient interactions, role-plays about triage and emergency care, or writing medical reports for NGOs replicated authentic contexts relevant to the current situation. Students were motivated by tasks connecting English learning to real-world humanitarian needs: translating medical instructions for internally displaced persons, creating first-aid infographics in English, and writing reflective essays about medical volunteering.

Online platforms such as Quizlet, Padlet, and Mentimeter maintained interactivity, while AI-based applications including ChatGPT assisted with writing exercises and language feedback [4; 8]. Teachers also used international open-access resources: WHO guidelines, TED Talks, and Coursera modules in order to expose students to authentic professional language. Technology thus served both pedagogical and psychological goals: enhancing language input while connecting students to the broader world and reducing feelings of isolation (Fig. 1).

Case Study: «English for Healthcare Communication in Crisis Contexts». A practical example illustrates how these principles can be applied. At one Ukrainian medical university (anonymised for confidentiality), an ESP course titled «English for Healthcare Communication in Crisis Contexts» was developed in 2023. Its aims included: enhancing professional vocabulary related

to emergency medicine and public health; fostering resilience and empathy through reflective discussion; and promoting teamwork and intercultural communication (Table 1).

Despite ongoing air alarms and limited access to electricity, over 90% of students completed the course successfully. Their feedback emphasised that learning English «helped them not to give up», providing «a space for self-expression and connection». These findings confirm that ESP can serve simultaneously as an academic and an existential support structure.

Discussion. Wartime ESP teaching poses serious challenges. Cognitive overload affects both students and teachers due to constant stress and fatigue [5]. Ethical boundaries must be respected: educators must avoid turning emotional discussions into therapy without professional training [6]. Standard testing formats are often inappropriate; alternative assessments (portfolios, reflection logs) are more suitable [9]. Access inequality remains a significant concern, particularly for rural or displaced students facing technological and social barriers [4].

For Ukrainian medical students, learning English is not merely academic: it symbolises belonging to the international medical and humanitarian community. Understanding global healthcare discourse and communicating with foreign colleagues gives students a sense of empowerment and hope. English thus becomes a tool of resilience: a way to tell their stories, share Ukrainian experiences with the world, and access knowledge that can save lives.

The wartime experience is transforming the philosophy of language education in Ukraine. Emerging trends include: deeper integration of

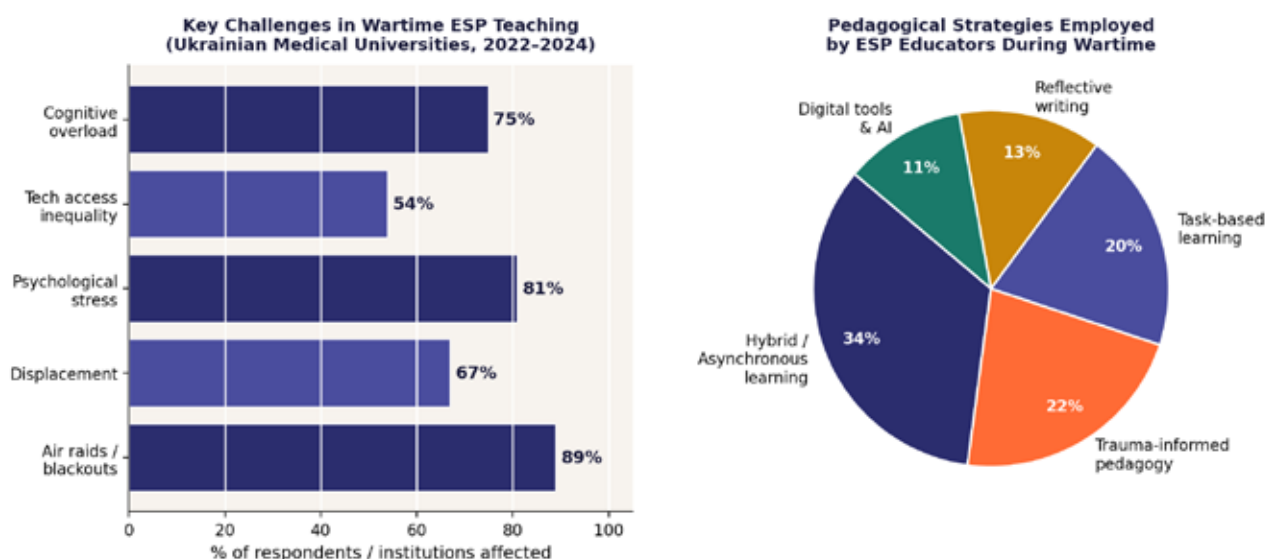


Fig. 1. Key challenges in wartime ESP teaching and pedagogical strategies employed by educators at Ukrainian medical universities (2022–2024)

Table 1

Structure and components of the ESP course in crisis conditions

Course component	Implementation	Purpose
Hybrid sessions	Weekly classes with online backup (Zoom/Teams)	Educational continuity
Reading materials	WHO emergency response manuals	Authentic professional context
Reflective writing	«My role as a future doctor in rebuilding Ukraine»	Identity and emotional processing
Collaborative projects	English-language public health campaigns for IDPs	Real-world context + teamwork
Outcome	Over 90% of students completed the course successfully	Validation of the model

soft skills (communication, empathy, adaptability) as core learning outcomes in medical ESP; an interdisciplinary approach where ESP intersects with psychology, ethics, and digital pedagogy; internationalisation through joint ESP modules with EU partner universities; and pedagogical innovation – hybrid flexible models that will enrich global best practices long after the war ends [4; 8].

Conclusions. Teaching professional English to Ukrainian medical students during wartime transcends traditional linguistic education. It is a human-centred mission merging language learning with emotional healing and global citizenship. The ESP classroom becomes a symbolic refuge where students rediscover stability, express emotions, and build confidence in their professional future.

This study identified five most effective strategies: trauma-informed pedagogy grounded

in the principles of safety, trust, and choice; hybrid asynchronous learning ensuring continuity under any conditions; task-based practices drawing on real humanitarian contexts; reflective writing as a bridge between professional identity and personal resilience; digital tools and AI for maintaining interactivity and reducing isolation.

Through trauma-informed pedagogy, flexible methods, and compassionate guidance, Ukrainian educators prove that education can endure even amid destruction. Their work stands as testimony to the power of language, not only to communicate but also to connect, comfort, and rebuild. As Ukraine moves toward reconstruction, the lessons learned from wartime teaching will remain invaluable for global educational practice: in the darkest times, teaching becomes an act of hope, and language that serves as a bridge between survival and renewal.

Bibliography:

1. Brown D. H., Lee H. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. 4th ed. White Plains, NY : Pearson Education, 2015. 648 p.
2. Richards J. C., Rodgers T. S. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. 3rd ed. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2019. 428 p.
3. Kolomiets T. V. Developing soft skills through hard times: humanistic education in wartime conditions. *SWorldJournal*. 2026. Vol. 4, No. 35–04. P. 9–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30888/2663-5712.2026-35-04-017>
4. Kuchyn I., Bielka K., Lymar L. et al. Academic performance, perceptions, and motivations of medical PhD students in Ukraine during wartime: a mixed methods study. *BMC Medical Education*. 2024. Vol. 24. Art. 1421. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06400-3>
5. Dewaele J.-M., Li C. Emotions in second language acquisition: A critical review and research agenda. *Language Teaching*. 2022. Vol. 55, No. 2. P. 229–250. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000185>
6. Carello J., Butler L. D. Practicing What We Teach: Trauma-Informed Educational Practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. 2015. Vol. 35, No. 3. P. 262–278. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059>
7. Anderson R., Landy B., Sanchez V. Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in Higher Education: Considerations for the Future of Research and Practice. *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education*. 2023. Vol. 2, No. 2. P. 125–140. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32674/jtse.v2i2.5012>
8. Кучин Ю. Л., Гребень Н. К., Стучинська Н. В., Лимар Л. В. Сучасна післядипломна медична освіта в Україні: виклики та траєкторія розвитку. *Медицина та фармація: освітні дискурси*. 2025. № 4. С. 3–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/eddiscourses/2025-4-1>
9. Nunan D. *Task-Based Language Teaching*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004. 222 p. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667336>

References:

1. Brown, H. D., & Lee, H. (2015). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
2. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2019). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

3. Kolomiets, T. V. (2026). Developing soft skills through hard times: Humanistic education in wartime conditions. *SWorldJournal*, 4(35–04), 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.30888/2663-5712.2026-35-04-017>
4. Kuchyn, I., Bielka, K., Lyman, L., et al. (2024). Academic performance, perceptions, and motivations of medical PhD students in Ukraine during wartime: A mixed methods study. *BMC Medical Education*, 24, Article 1421. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-06400-3>
5. Dewaele, J.-M., & Li, C. (2022). Emotions in second language acquisition: A critical review and research agenda. *Language Teaching*, 55(2), 229–250. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000185>
6. Carello, J., & Butler, L. D. (2015). Practicing what we teach: Trauma-informed educational practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 35(3), 262–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059>
7. Anderson, R., Landy, B., & Sanchez, V. (2023). Trauma-informed pedagogy in higher education: Considerations for the future of research and practice. *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education*, 2(2), 125–140. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jtse.v2i2.5012>
8. Kuchyn, Yu. L., Hreben, N. K., Stuchynska, N. V., & Lyman, L. V. (2025). *Suchasna pisliadyplomna medychna osvita v Ukraini: vyklyky ta traiektoriia rozvytku [Modern postgraduate medical education in Ukraine: Challenges and development trajectory]. Medytsyna ta farmatsiia: osvichni dyskursy (Medicine and Pharmacy: Educational Discourses)*, (4), 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.32782/eddiscourses/2025-4-1>
9. Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667336>

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 17.07.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 05.08.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 14.09.2026