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COMMUNICATIVE ADAPTATION OF UKRAINIANS, WHO FLED THE WAR, TO THE LIFE IN THE UK

The full-scale war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, forced over 8 million Ukrainians to seek refuge abroad. The UK, hosting approximately 217,000 Ukrainian refugees, became one of the main destinations. One of the critical challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees was their communicative adaptation, essential for integration into British society and the labor market. This study explores the communicative adaptation of Ukrainians who fled the war, analyzing factors influencing their language acquisition and confidence in English communication. A survey was conducted among 72 Ukrainian migrants attending language courses at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU). The research aimed to examine the correlation between the duration of stay in the UK, participation in language courses, interaction with sponsors, and perceived improvement in English proficiency. Findings indicate that prolonged cohabitation with British sponsors positively influenced language acquisition and ease of communication. While 77.8% of respondents had some level of English proficiency, confidence in speaking English varied. The study also reveals that fluency is the most desired skill among respondents, followed by basic English knowledge and business communication abilities. Importantly, social adaptation and career prospects were the primary motivations for learning English, with professional needs outweighing travel-related motivations.

The findings provide practical recommendations for improving ESL (English as a Second Language) programs for Ukrainian refugees in the UK, ensuring more effective integration into British society.

Keywords: *communicative adaptation, ESL, integration, language acquisition, Ukrainian refugees.*

INTRODUCTION

Global migration flows have intensified significantly in recent years. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide exceeded 70 million in 2019, and surged to 108.4 million in 2022 (UNHCR, 2023). This already critical situation was further exacerbated by the full-scale war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which resulted in an additional 8 million Ukrainians seeking refuge abroad (Ukrinform, 2023). The UK is the fourth country in terms of Ukrainians' arrivals after Germany, Poland, and Chechia and it hosted around 217.000 Ukrainians who fled the war (Ukrainian migration, 2024).

The major problem they brought with them is typical for the immigrants' one – the necessity of adaptation and integration into the society and the labour market. Effective adaptation for immigrants

hinges on their ability to communicate within their new environment, necessitating proficiency in the local language, both in terms of comprehension and spoken fluency. It is generally acknowledged that the ability to speak the language(s) of the receiving society usually plays an important part in the processes of their adaptation and integration as immigrants have “to learn and apply everything from where the language is spoken to how to speak, from the body language in the new culture to special idioms” (Cereci, 2023, p.12). Obviously, only linguistic skills are insufficient. Immigrants must also acquire and appropriately apply the nuances of local cultural codes and accepted behaviors. Therefore, comprehensive support for immigrants must incorporate language and cultural training. This support for the Ukrainians who fled the war is provided in the UK. It includes such components: state allowance, settlement at the sponsor’s, medical insurance, educating opportunities.

Firstly, the majority of Ukrainians arrived to the UK on the following schemes offered by the state: “Homes for Ukraine” or “Family scheme”. Each of them offered the settlement for the newly arrived at their sponsors’ who kindly hosted Ukrainians. Secondly, the hosts appeared those people who introduced the newly arrived Ukrainians to the environment and culture of the UK. And it was very important because typically immigrants clearly need a guide (Kofman, 2018, p. 42) as “a new environment, new people and new culture always confuse, sometimes turn into obsession” (Romankiewicz, et al, 2016, p. 104).

Thirdly, to make the adaptation easier the government and non-governmental organizations as well as educational establishments organized different courses for the Ukrainians. Realizing the significance of communication, various language courses were organized for the Ukrainians with the English-speaking level from the beginner to intermediate. One of the best practices is the language courses for the Ukrainians at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researchers’ attention in Ukraine and abroad has been drawn to adaptation to the life in other countries including social, cultural, academic (Banit, et al, 2021; Halytska & Hryshchuk, 2024), psychological (Halytska & Kuzmenko, 2023), and communicative. However, most analyzed scientific literature related to the issue in question is devoted to the problems of communication problems that migrants’ children can face. Surely, it is understandable as children have to study at schools. Without knowing the language of the host country, they have problems in communication. This issue is investigated in a number of research papers (Amirpur, 2010; Babane, 2020). However, Dr S. Cereci in her monograph devoted to the problems of immigration states that women often bear the heaviest burden of migration (2020, p.22). Considering that 70% of Ukrainians who fled the war to the UK are women (Ukrainian Migration, 2024), the problem of communication and English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking has become of paramount importance.

F. Taglieri and his colleagues (2013) emphasize the critical need of immigrants for communication channels to facilitate their adjustment to new environments. They pointed out that people who moved to a new place voluntarily or involuntarily need “intensive communication to share troubles and to get used to the new place as soon as possible”.

The similar position of researchers who investigate the migration problems is found in the publications by E. Collet and B. Gidley (2012, p. 34) who insisted on the migrants’ utter need of communication.

Even in cross-community migration communication and the acquisition of hosting community language plays a great role in successful integration of immigrants. This issue is revealed in the research conducted by K. Okorie (2024) who analyzed communication barriers and breakthrough in cross-cultural adaptation of immigrants.

An interesting research concerning immigrant’ communication adaptation and language acquisition was done by a researcher from Tansania University O. Akachukwu (2018). He analyzed learning host languages by immigrants from the position “language and culture” concluding that a man needs language to share his/her ideas and once he adopts or learns the host country’s culture, he/she would learn the language more easily. Thus, he argues that the more migrants feel part of the receiving country, the more

they are ready to acquire the necessary (linguistic and other) competence to become successful members (Akachukwu, 2018).

However, the major problems raised in the publications are of theoretical value while empirical research of the communication adaptation is scarce.

In view of the above-mentioned, it seems expedient to explore how Ukrainians adapted in the UK by means of communication. Hence, **the purpose of the article** is to shed light on key aspects of the adaptation process Ukrainians have been experiencing since their arrival to the UK, and on the obtained data to design a set of recommendations for adult Ukrainian in the UK on how to improve their communication and ease their adaptation.

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is of descriptive qualitative and quantitative character. In order to collect relevant research data, the authors designed a questionnaire and conducted a survey during April-May 2023 with the adult Ukrainian migrants who fled the war to the UK and who visited language courses at the CCCU.

Research questions. The following questions guided the current research:

1. *How does the length of stay in the UK influence the communication adaptation of the Ukrainians who fled the war?*

2. *How much does the level of English influence the reasons of learning a host country official language?*

Participants. In general, 72 persons aged 16 to 75 years old participated in the survey. 66% of the sample falls within the range of 33 to 60 years old. The analysis of gender characteristics proved the general tendency – more women than men arrived to the UK from Ukraine in search of a safe shelter. However, the obtained research data show 83.3% of women and 16.7% of men while the official statistics shows 70% of women. It appeared that all respondents had higher education with such variations: those with Junior Bachelor's degree and Bachelor's degree each group constituted 4.3%; Master's degree holders made up 34.8%. The biggest share was by Specialist's degree holders (53.6%) and the smallest share belonged to PhDs (2.9%).

The respondents who had fled the war arrived to the UK on both "Family scheme" (11.1%) and "Homes for Ukraine" (88.9%) scheme. Interestingly, they all had different employment status at the time of the survey. 20% of them were retired; 47.1% were unemployed. The rest of the respondents (32.9%) were employed among them 12.9% were working online for Ukrainian companies; 1.4% of the respondents were working online for English companies; 2.9% were freelancers; 15.7% of the respondents did not specify their job.

The number of months of their staying in England ranged from 1 to 14 months; on average – 7.1; 66% of the sample fell within the range from 3.9 to 10.3 months. The respondents stayed at their sponsors' for various periods of time. The number of months ranged from 0 to 12 months; on average – 5.53. In general, 66% of the sample fell within the range from 2 to 9 months.

Methods. The developed questionnaire underwent preliminary testing, with incomplete or problematic questions removed. Ethical approval for the survey was obtained from the Canterbury Christ Church University (United Kingdom) ethics board. Data collection occurred between March 1, 2023, and April 28, 2023, among students enrolled in English language courses at the aforementioned university. Prior to participation, all respondents received comprehensive instructions, emphasizing the importance of independent and anonymous responses. Furthermore, respondents were assured that participation in the survey posed no risk.

The questionnaire consisted of two blocs of questions: personal and research-related. The first group of questions helped gather the information on age, sex, degree level of education, employment status, scheme of arriving to the UK, date of arrival, the time the migrants have stayed with their sponsors. The second group of questions concerned the length of studying English; the reasons of learning English; the major difficulties in the communication and in learning English; how confident they feel when speaking English and what knowledge, skills and abilities are necessary to communicate

confidently; what factors affect their progress in language learning mostly and some others. The questionnaire is attached in the Annex 1.

Data Analysis. Spearman's rank correlation method was used to assess the obtained quantitative results and determine how closely two variables fluctuate. In other words, it was interesting to check if there is a positive or negative correlation between different data scales, for instance a respondents' perception of language improvement against the length of stay in the UK. Typically, the Spearman's coefficient is interpreted together with p-level. It helps assess whether a correlation is real, that is if it is statistically significant (DataTab, 2025).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Communicative adaptation is the process by which individuals adjust their ways of communicating with the new social norms and expectations (Anggara, 2024). For Ukrainians who fled the war the UK became a safe shelter. In order to feel there comfortably it was necessary to adapt and further to integrate into a new society. An effective tool of their adaptation and integration likewise to other immigrants has become communication. It is no wonder as communication is the voluntary or involuntary need of all immigrants who have to communicate to maintain their lives (Uebele, 2016, p. 20). However, the assistance in improving their communication skills require specific and serious practices (Cereci, 2023, p. 12).

To meet the need CCCU organized special language courses for Ukrainians. Their level of English according to the groups of English at CCCU demonstrated that the majority of Ukrainian immigrants could speak English (77.8%) although their levels were different. 51.4% of the respondents had intermediate level of English while 26,4% could speak on the elementary level. 22.2% of Ukrainians were beginners.

To find the answers to the first research question it was necessary to learn a students' perception of language improvement (questionnaire item 17) and their ease of communication (item 20). The following results were obtained (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

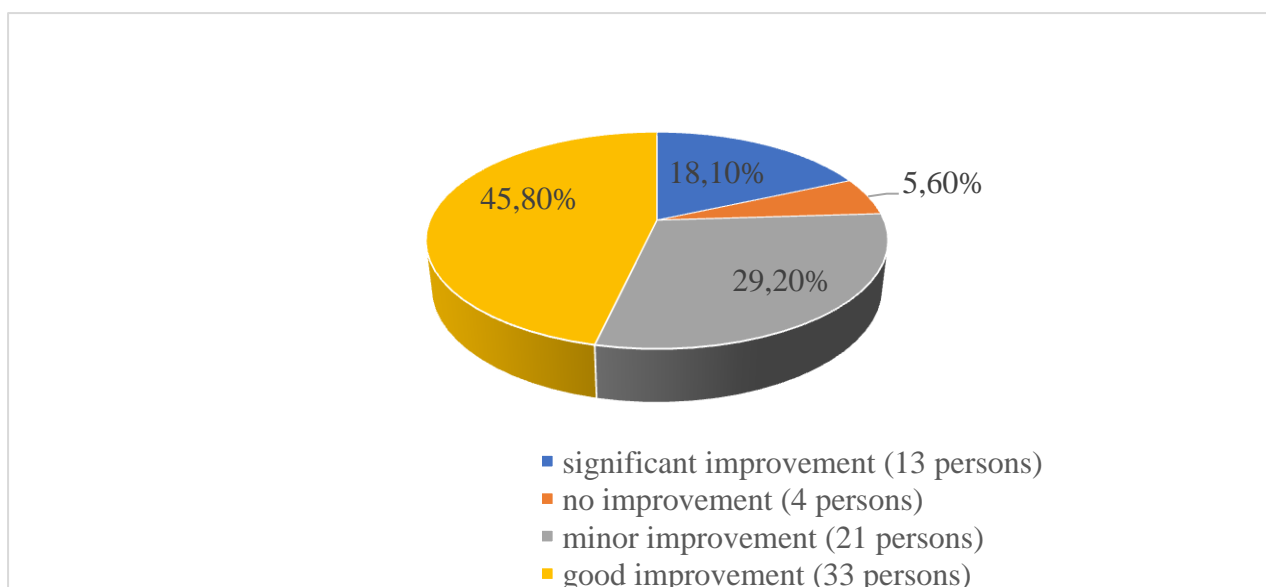


Figure 1. The answers to the question on how much the level of English has improved
Source: created by authors

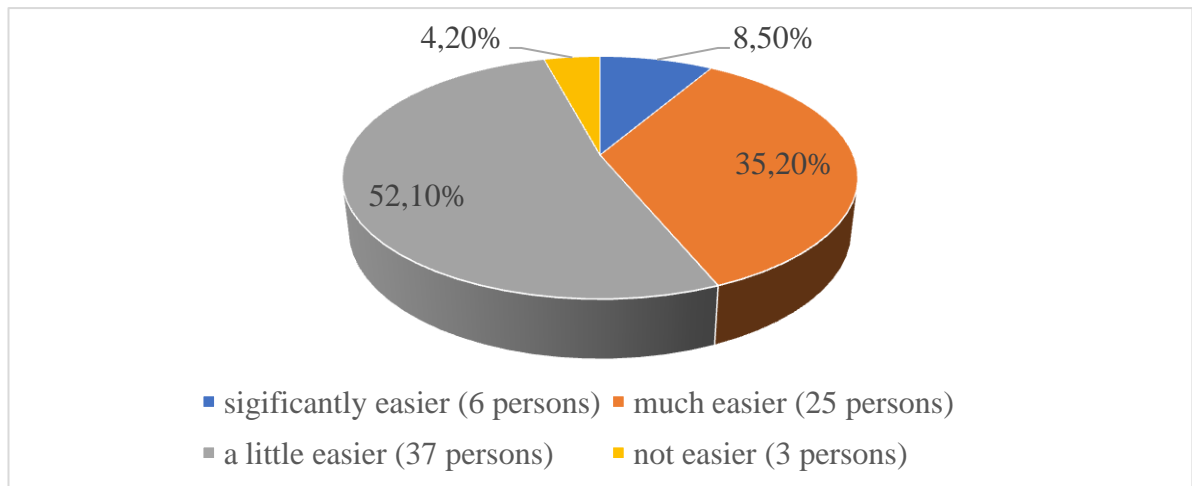


Figure 2. **The answers to the question on how much easier it has become to communicate in English during their stay in England**

Source: created by authors

As it is seen from Figure 1, a significant improvement of their English during their CCCU language courses is observed in 18,1% of the respondents; the majority of Ukrainians (45,8%) experienced a good improvement; nearly a third of the sample (29,2%) had a minor improvement. Figure 2 represents that 8,5% of Ukrainians feel that it has become significantly easier for them to communicate in English during their stay in England; for 25% of the respondents, it has become much easier; a little easier it has become for 52,1%. No improvement is experienced by 5,6% of the interviewed (Figure 1) and approximately the same result is seen in Figure 2 – it has not become easier for 4,2% of Ukrainians to communicate in English.

On receiving these data, we measured different scales: a students’ perception of language improvement and ease of communication against length of stay in England, months studying English at CCCU and number of months living with a sponsor. The correlation results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlation between scales: the length of stay in England, taking English courses, living with a sponsor and improvement in level of English

Questionnaire item	Methods	Number of months of staying in England	Number of months of studying English at CCCU	Number of months of staying with a sponsor
How much has your level of English improved during your University language courses	Spearman coefficient	0.044	0.167	0.105
	p	0.713	0.161	0.379
How much easier has it become for you to communicate in English during your stay in England	Spearman coefficient	0.060	0.171	0.311 ** ¹
	p	0.620	0.153	0.08

Source: created by the authors

¹ ** the stars flag levels of significance. If a p-value is less than 0.05, it is flagged with one star (*). If a p-value is less than 0.01, it is flagged with 2 stars (**). If a p-value is less than 0.001, it is flagged with three stars (***)

Judging from the table, it is obvious that there is evidence of positive correlation with ease of communication and living with a sponsor. Unsurprisingly, the longer Ukrainians were hosted by a sponsor, the easier it was for them to communicate in English.

We added two more items from the questionnaire (items 15–16) to define the level of confidence when the respondents speak English and what knowledge, skills and abilities they need to communicate confidently in English.

Figure 3 represents that 5,6% of the respondents feel quite confident when they speak English; the majority of the sample (47,2%) is confident; a third of the interviewed (30,6%) is slightly confident and 16,7% of the Ukrainians do not feel confident when they speak English.

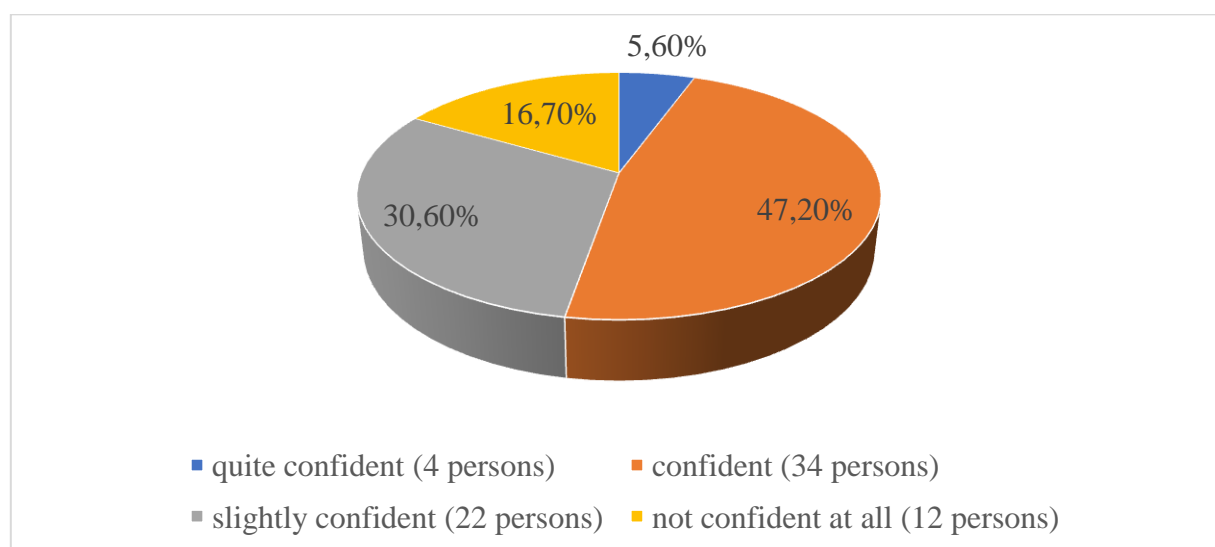


Figure 3. **The answers to the question on how confident the respondents are when they speak English**

Source: created by authors

The results of the question on what knowledge, skills and abilities the respondents need to communicate confidently in English are shown in Figure 4.

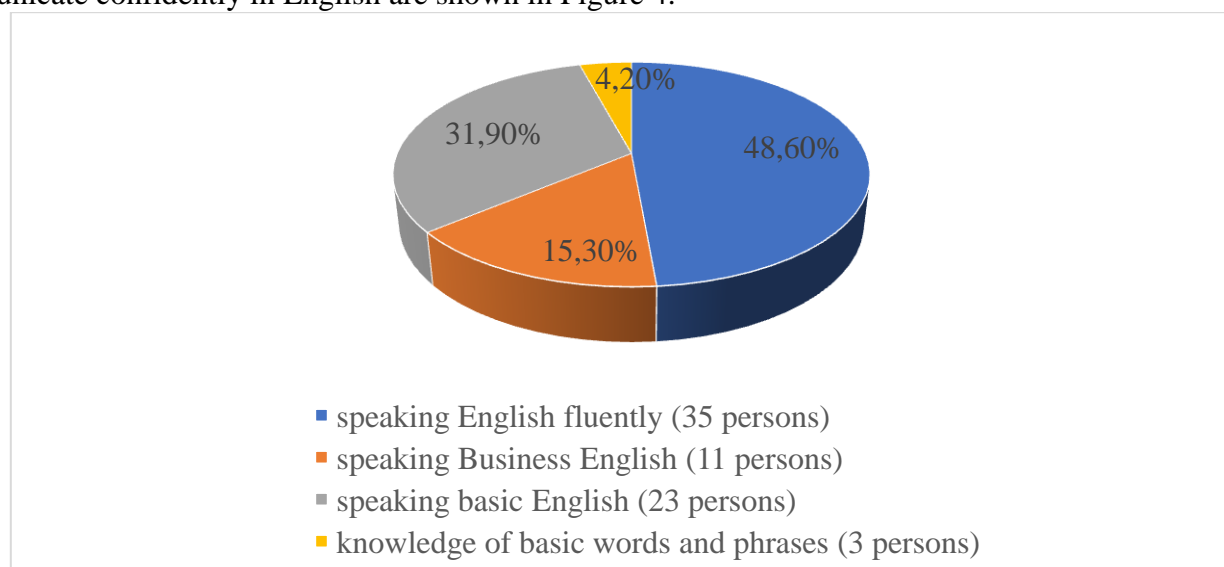


Figure 4. **The answers to the question on what knowledge, skills and abilities the respondents need to communicate confidently in English**

Source: created by authors

In the respondents' opinion, 48,6% think that fluency is one of the most necessary things in speaking English confidently; for 31,9% of the interviewed basic English is required to speak English confidently; the knowledge of Business English will help 15,3% of the respondents to communicate confidently and the knowledge of basic words and phrases will be useful for 4,2% of the sample.

The correlation between the answers to the questions 15, 16, 17 and 20 is demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation between scales 15, 16, 17 and 20

	How much has your level of English improved during your University language courses	How much easier has it become for you to communicate in English during your stay in England	How confident are you when you speak English
How much easier has it become for you to communicate in English during your stay in England	0.520 ***	—	
	< .001	—	
How confident are you when you speak English	0.073	0.384 ***	—
	0.543	< .001	—
What knowledge, skills and abilities do you need to communicate confidently in English	0.009	0.112	0.485 ***
	0.942	0.351	< .001

Source: created by authors

Such correlations have been traced in Table 2: the more fluent people are, the more confident they are in English; the more confident they are, the easier for them to communicate in English; the higher level of English, the easier it is for the respondents to communicate.

It is expedient to trace one more correlation between the level of English that includes answers to the above-mentioned questionnaire items (15, 16, 17, 20) and the reasons of learning English (item 11).

Figure 5 represents the types of reasons why the Ukrainians consider it important to learn English and the importance level.

Unsurprisingly, the top important reason of learning English is social (99% which includes 64% of very important; 18% fairly important and 17% of important)); business and career occupy the second place in the criterion “very important” (50%), and educational reason is in the third place (49% think it very important). However, general important (very, fairly and important) are both educational reasons and travelling (94% and 93% correspondingly). Interestingly, 8% of the respondents are sure that business and career are not important at all in learning English. Other reasons (educational and travelling) are equally (1%) not important in the respondents' opinion. Social reasons were not marked as “not important”.

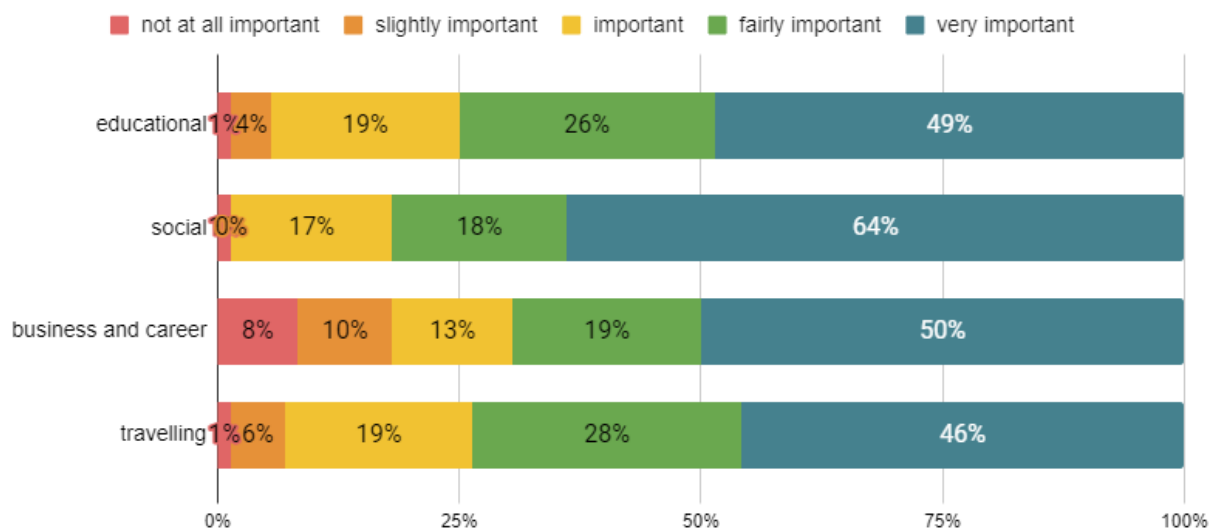


Figure 5. The answers to the question on the importance of reasons of learning English
Source: created by authors

The results of correlating the variables “level of English” and “reasons of learning English” are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

The respondents’ level of English versus reasons of learning English

		How much has your level of English improved during your University language courses	How much easier has it become for you to communicate in English during your stay in England	How confident are you when you speak English	What knowledge, skills and abilities do you need to communicate confidently in English	Level of English
educational	Spearman coefficient	0.077	0.101	-0.007	-0.063	0.171
	p	0.520	0.404	0.956	0.598	0.150
social	Spearman coefficient	0.042	0.069	-0.127	0.011	0.052
	p	0.725	0.566	0.289	0.926	0.664
business and career	Spearman coefficient	0.069	0.207	0.356 **	0.353 **	0.450 ***
	p	0.566	0.084	0.002	0.002	< .001
travelling	Spearman coefficient	-0.213	-0.201	-0.286 *	-0.215	-0.435 ***
	p	0.072	0.092	0.015	0.070	< .001
The importance of the reasons	Spearman coefficient	-0.044	0.045	0.061	0.170	0.218
	p	0.713	0.708	0.612	0.153	0.066

Source: created by authors

Positive and negative correlation is seen from the Table 3. The more confident and fluent people are, “business and career” is the most important reason for learning English. And negative correlation: the higher the level of English and fluency is, the less important for them is a travelling reason. So, the reasons for learning English are more professionally motivated.

CONCLUSION

The forced displacement of Ukrainians following the 2022 Russian invasion has presented a multitude of challenges, with communication adaptation proving a crucial one for successful adaptation and integration into the host society. These refugees face the dual burden of linguistic barriers and cultural differences. Effective communicative adaptation, therefore, becomes paramount for accessing essential services, building social connections, and ultimately rebuilding their lives in the UK.

An effective means of adaptation is acquiring the host country’s language. The current research gave answers to the questions on how the length of stay in the UK influenced the communication adaptation of the Ukrainians who fled the war and how much the level of English influences the reasons of learning English.

Two significant conclusions have been made. Firstly, it appeared that the length of stay really impacts the communication adaptation. The following correlation is typical: the longer the Ukrainians stay in the UK, the easier it is for them to communicate in English. The nuance is that the Ukrainians stay at their sponsor’s. Clearly, it is the sponsor who is not only a person to speak English to, but also the person who is a guide into cultural differences of the host country.

Secondly, another correlation demonstrates that the level of English the Ukrainians have, define the reasons of its learning. It appeared that social reason is dominant among others. Very important reasons are also business and career, and education. Mostly, the higher the level of English is, the more professionally oriented reasons for learning English the Ukrainians have.

To sum up, the communication adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in the UK is a multifaceted process. It necessitates not only language acquisition and communication but also an understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. By embracing linguistic diversity and fostering intercultural understanding, the UK can facilitate the successful integration of the Ukrainians, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their new communities.

Perspectives of further research. It would be interesting to systemize all the research results and trace other correlations in the conducted survey at the CCCU. In addition, the ability of older immigrants to communicate English and adapt into a host community can be of scientific interest in order to select appropriate methods of teaching English at language courses at CCCU.

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КОМУНІКАТИВНА АДАПТАЦІЯ УКРАЇНЦІВ – ВИМУШЕНИХ МІГРАНТІВ ДО ЖИТТЯ У ВЕЛИКІЙ БРИТАНІЇ

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Повномасштабна війна, розв'язана Російською Федерацією проти України 24 лютого 2022 року, спричинила безпрецедентну хвилю вимушеної міграції. Близько 8 мільйонів українців були змушені шукати притулку за кордоном, і Велика Британія прийняла понад 217 000 українських переселенців. Однією з основних проблем, з якими вони зіткнулися, стала необхідність адаптації та інтеграції в нове суспільство. Одним з ключових аспектів цього процесу є комунікативна адаптація, що передбачає опанування англійської мови та засвоєння культурних кодів нового середовища. Дослідження ґрунтується на якісному та кількісному аналізі даних, зібраних шляхом опитування 72 українських переселенців, які відвідували мовні курси в Canterbury Christ Church University у 2023 році. Аналіз результатів засвідчив, що більшість респондентів (77,8%) мали хоча б базові знання англійської мови, причому рівень володіння варіювався від початкового до середнього. Виявлено, що тривалість перебування в родинних британських спонсорів позитивно впливала на здатність спілкуватися

англійською мовою. Також встановлено, що чим впевненішими почувалися респонденти у своїх мовленнєвих навичках, тим легше їм було адаптуватися. Окрім лінгвістичних аспектів, дослідження підтвердило важливість соціальної взаємодії для успішної адаптації українців у Великій Британії. Найважливішими мотиваціями для вивчення англійської мови респонденти назвали соціальні (99%), професійні (50%) та освітні (49%) причини.

Ключові слова: англійська як друга мова (ESL), інтеграція, комунікативна адаптація, оволодіння мовою, українські біженці.