

ADVANCING CIVIC COMPETENCE THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING IN CRISIS CONTEXTS

Raisa Gladushyna¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6760-0487>

¹*Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kyiv, Ukraine*

Corresponding author: gladushyna.raisa@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-609-9-10>

Keywords: civic competence; service-learning; crisis contexts; civic resilience; pre-service teacher education.

The ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine has transformed higher educational settings into an academic space of civic resilience, public involvement, and social responsibility. In crisis contexts, universities become key agents of social integration and moral leadership, addressing both academic and community needs. Under these emergency conditions, higher education institutions play a critical role in fostering active citizenship, resilience, and democratic values among students.

Within this framework, service-learning emerges as a pedagogical approach to integrate academic learning with socially meaningful action. This study explores the development of civic competence in a wartime environment through service-learning practices among pre-service English teachers in Ukraine. It focuses on a case study in the course “Practical English and Translation” implemented at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University.

The study is grounded in the university’s philosophy of servant leadership and its mission: “Service to the individual, the community, and society,” which emphasizes human dignity, responsibility, trust, and social engagement as core educational values. At Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (BGKMU), servant leadership is not just a concept but the core philosophy of its corporate culture.

According to the university’s institutional vision, higher education should promote personal development and contribute to society’s advancement through socially responsible practices and active citizenship. This educational philosophy has become particularly significant during wartime, when students and teachers must respond to humanitarian, psychological, and communicative challenges during rapidly changing social realities.

The theoretical framework of the research integrates concepts of civic competence, experiential learning, critical pedagogy, and service-learning. Civic competence is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes democratic values, ethical responsibility, critical thinking, intercultural communication, participation in community life, and the ability to act for the common good. The course “Practical English and Translation” was redesigned in line with service-learning principles to connect language acquisition with socially meaningful engagement. In addition to traditional classroom activities, students participated in translation, communication, and educational support initiatives aimed at assisting internally displaced people, children affected by war, volunteer organizations, and international communication projects. These activities included translating informational materials for humanitarian initiatives, creating bilingual educational resources for children, and conducting online English-speaking clubs for school students.

The service-learning model was structured around three interconnected dimensions: linguistic development, civic participation, and reflective practice. Thus, students applied translation and communication skills in authentic social contexts, increasing motivation and professional confidence. Pre-service English teachers engaged directly with social issues related to war, displacement, trauma, inclusion, and intercultural solidarity. Reflective journals, group discussions, and digital storytelling tasks enabled the fourth-year students to critically analyze their experiences and connect them to broader democratic values and professional ethics.

The findings demonstrate that service-learning in crisis contexts contributes significantly to the development of civic competence among pre-service teachers. Also, several key outcomes were identified.

First, students demonstrated increased social responsibility and empathy. Direct interaction with vulnerable populations encouraged future teachers to review the social role of language education and recognize the moral aspects of teaching and translation. Reflection activities revealed that students perceived English not only as an academic subject but as a tool for advocacy, intercultural mediation, and humanitarian communication.

Second, participation in socially oriented translation projects strengthened democratic and intercultural awareness. Students

became more attentive to issues of inclusion, representation, accessibility, and ethical communication. Working with international audiences also improved their understanding of global citizenship and international solidarity. This finding is especially important in the Ukrainian context, where intercultural communication has become central to international cooperation and public diplomacy during wartime.

Third, service-learning enhanced resilience and agency. Wartime education often generates emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, and a lack of motivation. However, students involved in meaningful community-oriented activities reported higher levels of engagement and inner strength.

Fourth, the case study revealed the transformative potential of reflective pedagogy. Reflection sessions encouraged students to critically evaluate stereotypes, misinformation, ethical dilemmas, and communication challenges emerging in wartime contexts. Such practices contributed to the development of critical thinking and dialogic interaction, both of which are central components of civic competence. The findings resonate with broader educational initiatives at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University that emphasize interactive and human-centered learning under martial law conditions.

The study suggests that service-learning should not be treated as an additional extracurricular activity but rather as an integrated pedagogical strategy within teacher education curricula. In crisis contexts, service-learning creates opportunities for combining professional training with civic engagement, emotional support, and active citizenship.

The research also highlights several challenges. These include emotional overload among students, technological inequalities during online learning, difficulties coordinating community partnerships during wartime, and the need for institutional support for reflective and trauma-informed pedagogy.

The study concludes that service-learning represents an effective tool for developing civic competence among pre-service English teachers in Ukraine. Through the incorporation of academic content, social engagement, and reflective practice, students acquire not only professional communication skills but also democratic values, ethical awareness, resilience, and active citizenship.

The pedagogical model at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, integrating servant leadership theory, creates an effective teaching strategy to develop ethically aware, socially responsible educators capable of navigating complex modern challenges. In the broader European and global context, this case contributes to discussions on the role of higher education in sustaining democratic culture during periods of war, displacement, and social uncertainty.