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## FOSTERING HEALTH LITERACY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Abstract.** This article proposes a framework for integrating a health-oriented approach into English language classes in higher education to enhance health literacy among students. The research explores the practical ways to introduce health literacy into English language education in higher education settings, highlighting its potential to enhance both linguistic and personal development. The urgency of the article is explained by the fact that, in today's digital and globalised world, English is not only essential for communication and career growth but also serves as a key tool for understanding and navigating different kinds of vital information, including health-related issues. Given the increasing volume of health misinformation, fostering critical thinking and informed decision-making becomes essential for forming students' worldview.

The authors argue that English language classrooms provide an ideal platform to address this need by embedding health-related content into lessons. The study presents practical examples from Ukrainian universities, where topics like artificial intelligence in healthcare, work-life balance, and the lifestyle of professional athletes were used to engage students while studying English. Activities such as podcasts, discussions, self-assessment surveys, and the Six Thinking Hats technique demonstrated how students developed both language and soft skills while reflecting on healthy behaviours and personal choices.

The research emphasises that health literacy is not just about understanding medical terms, but involves accessing, evaluating, and applying health information meaningfully. Integrating such content enhances students' motivation, self-awareness, and critical engagement, supporting the development of a health-conscious worldview. Ultimately, the article advocates for a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to language education that responds to the challenges of modern society.

**Keywords:** English language, health literacy, linguistic competence, digital literacy, health-oriented, worldview, communicative approach.

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## **СПРИЯННЯ ФОРМУВАННЮ ЗДОРОВ'ЯЗБЕРЕЖУВАЛЬНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ НА ЗАНЯТТЯХ З АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ЗАКЛАДАХ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ**

**Анотація.** Стаття пропонує концептуальну основу для інтеграції здоров'язбережувального підходу до занять з англійської мови у закладах вищої освіти з метою підвищення рівня обізнаності у сфері здоров'я здобувачів вищої освіти. У дослідженні розглядаються практичні шляхи впровадження компонентів здоров'язбереження в освітній процес в контексті вивчення англійської мови у вищій школі, акцентуючи увагу на потенціалі такого підходу для розвитку як мовних, мовленнєвих, так і особистісних компетентностей. Актуальність статті зумовлена тим, що в умовах цифровізованого та глобалізованого світу англійська мова є не лише необхідною для комунікації та професійного зростання, а й виступає ключовим інструментом для орієнтації у різноманітній важливій інформації, зокрема й з питань здоров'я. В умовах зростання обсягів недостовірної інформації про здоров'я важливим стає формування критичного мислення та навичок ухвалення зважених рішень, що безпосередньо впливає на формування світогляду здобувачів освіти.

Автори доводять, що заняття з англійської мови створюють ідеальне середовище для вирішення цього завдання шляхом інтеграції контенту, пов'язаного зі здоров'ям, у навчальні модулі. У статті наведено приклади з практики українських університетів, де для активізації пізнавальної діяльності здобувачів на заняттях з англійської мови використовувалися теми, пов'язані з використанням штучного інтелекту в медицині, балансом між роботою та особистим життям, а також способом життя професійних спортсменів. Такі активності, як прослуховування подкастів, обговорення, опитування та метод Six Thinking Hats, показали, як здобувачі водночас розвивають лінгвістичні компетентності та гнучкі навички одночасно рефлексуючи над здоровим способом життя та особистим вибором.

У дослідженні наголошується, що здоров'язбережувальна компетентність і грамотність – це не лише розуміння медичної термінології, а здатність осмислено знаходити, оцінювати та застосовувати інформацію про здоров'я в

реальному житті. Інтеграція такого змісту підвищує мотивацію здобувачів освіти, сприяє самоусвідомленню та розвитку критичного мислення, підтримуючи формування здоров'язбережувального світогляду. У статті обґрунтовується необхідність більш цілісного та міждисциплінарного підходу до мовної освіти, що відповідає викликам сучасного суспільства.

**Ключові слова:** англійська мова, здоров'язбережувальна компетентність, лінгвістична компетентності, цифрова грамотність, здоров'яорієнтований, світогляд, комунікативний підхід.

**Problem statement.** In a modern globalised world, the English language has become one of the most useful tools needed for communication, research, entertainment and professional growth. People from various linguistic backgrounds worldwide can establish private, business, and political connections when equipped with the appropriate level of language proficiency. English also plays a crucial role in forming the worldview of future generations, having the unique ability to combine and present materials on a wide range of topics. The dominant role of English in all spheres of human activities proves the necessity to master the language, starting from school students to representatives of various business domains. Moreover, technological influence cannot be overlooked. With the abundance of technologies, social networks and artificial intelligence tools, one must possess the language skills to navigate the digital environment.

One more important concern of modern society is health literacy, which has emerged as a critical component of public well-being. Fostering health literacy is becoming one of the essential components of being involved in social and economic activities of a society [3, 12]. Being exposed to the information and news about the healthcare system and activities doesn't always make life easier, making people question their quality of life from different angles. The modern environment is informationally overloaded, and when it comes to health information (diseases, healthcare trends, medical advancements and treatments), people become too overwhelmed with data and the possible consequences of their lifestyle choices, which does not automatically translate to better understanding or improved outcomes. This proves individuals need to possess soft skills such as critical thinking, informed decision making, and the ability to apply information effectively, reflect on their activities, and take responsibility for their actions.

Higher education institutions, particularly those offering English language instruction, have a unique opportunity to combine the basic knowledge and skills on health literacy with their curricula. Integrating health-related content into English classes can significantly influence students' ability to engage in healthy behaviours and participate fully in society. Educators can equip learners with the linguistic and cognitive tools to navigate complex health information and effectively engage with healthcare systems. Despite this potential, English language classes often overlook health-related content and focus instead on general, academic, or business communication skills.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Health literacy has been determined as a multidimensional competence that comprises individual knowledge and broader societal, cultural, and educational frameworks. According to the Health Promotion Glossary of Terms (2021), health literacy is not merely an individual



responsibility but a product of both personal capacities and structural resources. It involves the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and use health information and services to maintain and improve health and well-being [6].

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the need to develop health literacy competencies as individuals must be able to critically evaluate a vast amount of digital content to make protective health decisions [4]. The challenge is especially acute among young people, who turn to online and social media sources for health-related information. Students with low levels of health literacy are more likely to be influenced by misinformation on social media, posing risks to themselves and others through spreading harmful practices or scepticism toward public health guidance [13]. Similarly, low health literacy correlates with poorer health outcomes and ineffective use of health services [14].

In this context, researchers stress that education is not solely about imparting professional skills but also about shaping students' worldviews and core values [8]. Digital, linguistic, and health competences interact synergistically, contributing not only to academic development but also to the broader cultural competence of university graduates [1], which highlights the need to foster health literacy as an integrated part of soft skills [14].

Therefore, higher education has a key role in fostering health-oriented worldviews. This includes helping students regulate their behaviours in line with healthy lifestyle principles, integrate diverse life experiences into a coherent health-focused system, and anticipate the consequences of health-related decisions [12]. Education tailored to personal development can contribute to health awareness and behaviour. In practice, students at the higher education level increasingly demonstrate a desire for self-actualisation and engagement in initiatives that promote healthy environments [10].

To build effective health promotion programs in universities, addressing basic psychological needs and enhancing self-esteem is crucial. For instance, inclusive classroom practices must accommodate diverse learners, including those with special educational needs who require adapted strategies that highlight their strengths while promoting equal access to educational and health-related content [2]. Moreover, educational interventions should aim not only to transfer knowledge but to motivate healthy behaviours by addressing students' intrinsic needs [7]; thus, fostering resilience and well-being is an integral aspect of health literacy development [9].

Cultural and social factors also influence how health information is interpreted and applied [5], and English language classes ideally serve to foster this worldview formation. When integrated thoughtfully into the curriculum, English instruction can support students in navigating health-related content, assessing the credibility of online information, and engaging in meaningful discussions about well-being, inclusivity, and personal responsibility.

The purpose of the article. Given the data mentioned above, we aim to explore the potential of English language classes in higher education as a means of fostering students' health literacy, and demonstrate how the seamless integration of health-related content during English lessons can contribute to the formation of students' worldviews, enhance their ability to access and evaluate information, and support their overall psychological and professional development.

Presentation of the main material. The English language classroom offers a dynamic space for language acquisition and building essential life skills. Integrating health literacy into lessons can empower students to navigate real-world health information confidently and strengthen their health-oriented worldview. By embedding health literacy into English lessons, educators can provide students with tools for both communication and well-being. Effective integration of health literacy principles into the English language classroom can be achieved by introducing student-led discussions and dialogues, learning targeted vocabulary specific to health contexts, and practising questions and activities such as reading medication or nutrition labels. Health literacy is not merely the ability to understand medical information, but a broader personal and social competence that includes the capacity to access, evaluate, and apply health-related knowledge in everyday life. Furthermore, it is crucial to incorporate activities focused on identifying and critically assessing reliable health information sources, especially online. This emphasises practical, real-world health scenarios, where language acquisition is embedded within relevant contexts, fostering students' worldview.

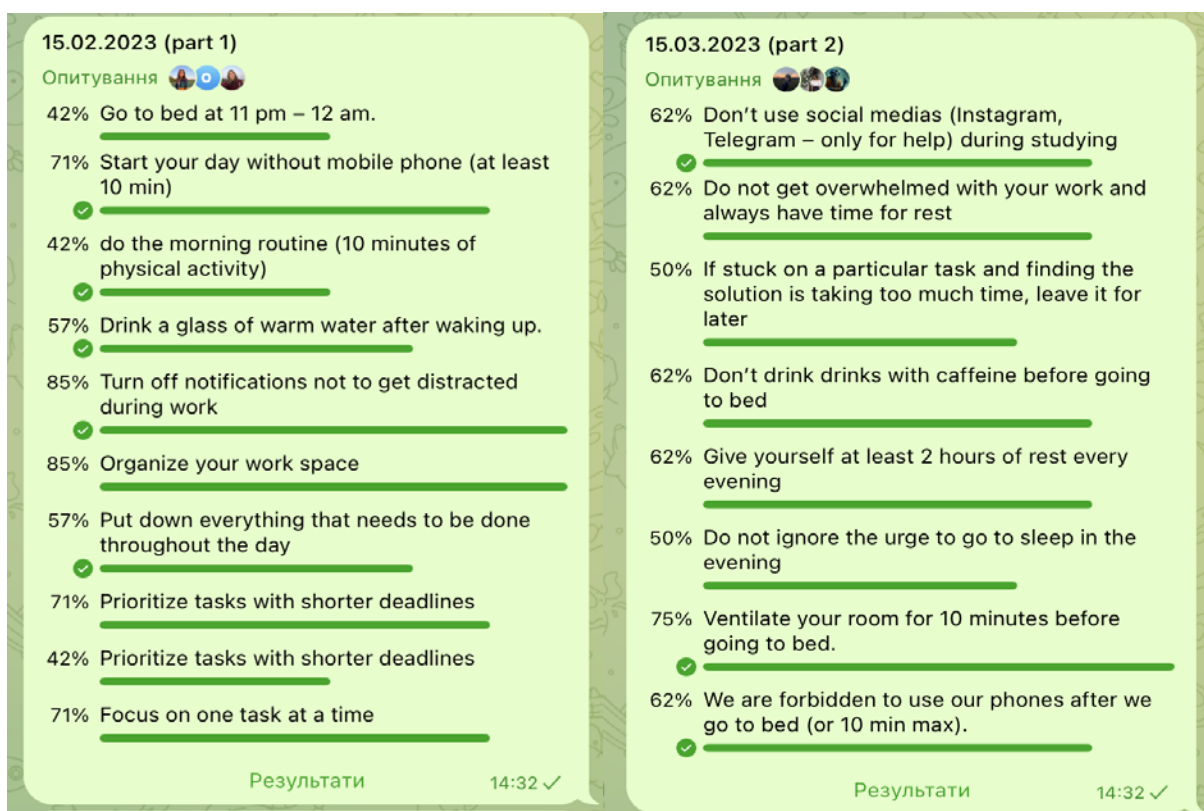
Educators who have the tools to embed the necessary content within the curriculum can lead their students to develop their linguistic, digital and health competences while studying various study modules. This can be achieved by selecting authentic materials such as podcasts, news articles, interviews, or case studies that touch health topics while aligning with core language learning objectives.

For instance, while studying a module focused on Technology and Artificial Intelligence, the students of H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University (KhNPU) and Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics (KhNEU) were offered to listen to a podcast episode "Is AI getting out of control?" [11]. In the episode, the journalists, apart from discussing the history of the tool, its rapid rise, and its applications in different industries, contemplated using AI to provide medical support. In the podcast, the presenters offered a case study where they addressed ChatGPT in case of emergency and received general recommendations that might lead to fatal consequences. This authentic material served as a starting point for relevant vocabulary development, listening comprehension, and critical discussion. The segment prompted students to reflect on the ethical, technological, and emotional implications of using AI in healthcare. In the follow-up activities, students discussed the importance of digital and health literacy in the modern world while developing their critical thinking skills. They practised expressing their agreement and disagreement while enhancing their English skills.

In the unit on Professions and Career Development, the health focus was integrated through the topic of work-life balance and mental well-being. Students were encouraged to brainstorm effective strategies to maintain a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives. After evaluating the ideas critically in pairs and small groups, the class collectively created a list of rules to promote a healthier lifestyle among students. These included actions such as taking regular breaks, maintaining hydration, exercising, limiting screen time after class, and practising mindfulness. The list was discussed and approved through a class vote, fostering ownership and group motivation. To support long-term engagement with these habits, students were encouraged to fill in short self-assessment

surveys at the beginning of each lesson, ticking off the actions they had completed since the previous session (Pic. 1). Moreover, to establish a trustworthy relationship between the instructor and students and promote student-centered learning, the teachers were also entitled to complete the questionnaire and present their points of view on the questions of challenges and difficulties and why they haven't completed the activities.

After one month, the students reevaluated the list's effectiveness. They discussed reasons for completing or skipping particular actions and proposed ways to overcome barriers, while practising relevant vocabulary, language functions, and grammatical structures. This cycle nurtured health-oriented behaviour and built skills such as reflection and goal-setting.



*Pic. 1. Conducting self-assessment surveys aimed at healthy lifestyle maintenance (Source: Authors' own conception).*

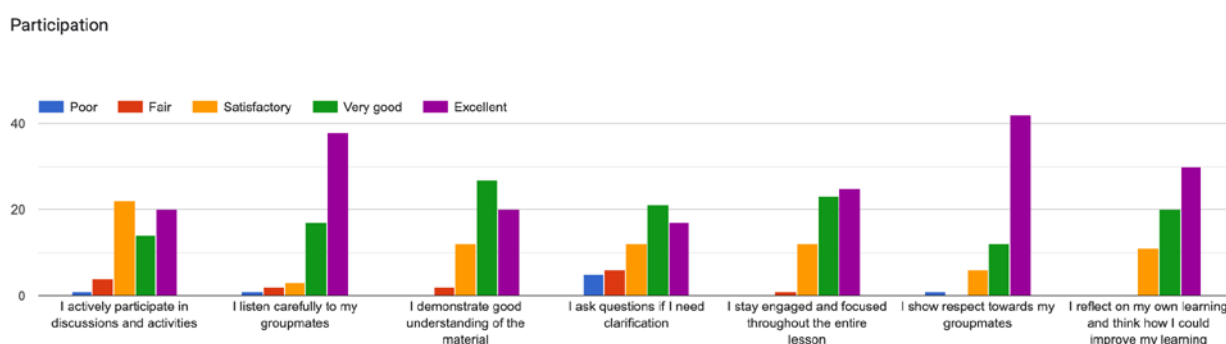
Additionally, the Six Thinking Hats technique was employed during English classes on Sports to encourage deeper thinking about the pros and cons of becoming a professional athlete. Students took on different roles – emotional, logical, critical, creative, optimistic, and process-focused- to consider various perspectives on competitive sports' physical and mental demands. This activity allowed for rich vocabulary development, the use of modals and conditionals, and engagement with argumentative language, while simultaneously promoting an awareness of both the benefits and the challenges of sports concerning personal health.

These practical examples illustrate that integrating health literacy into English language instruction is possible and highly beneficial. It promotes the holistic



development of students, aligning language education with personal well-being, critical thinking, and responsible citizenship. By embedding health-related themes in meaningful, communicative contexts, language educators can empower students to use English for academic or professional purposes and as a tool for making informed and healthy life choices.

Integrating health literacy content into English language instruction has demonstrated several positive outcomes, both in terms of language development and students' attitudes toward health-related topics. Observations, student feedback, and reflective tasks conducted during and after the lessons revealed a noticeable increase in student engagement and motivation (Pic. 2).



*Pic.2. The comparative results showing an increase in student level of engagement and motivation (Source: Authors' own conception).*

Firstly, incorporating real-life health topics, such as AI in healthcare, mental well-being, and the lifestyle of professional athletes, sparked genuine interest and curiosity among students. Learners reported that these discussions felt meaningful and relevant to their lives, contributing to higher participation levels and more thoughtful contributions during classroom interactions. Secondly, regular reflection activities, such as filling in progress checklists and evaluating personal habits, fostered greater responsibility and self-awareness. Many students reported becoming more conscious of their daily routines and more open to discussing mental and physical health. Furthermore, from a linguistic perspective, the tasks supported the development of all four key language skills. Importantly, students also practised soft skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and respectful disagreement.

Overall, integrating health literacy themes into English lessons did not compromise linguistic goals. On the contrary, it enriched the learning process by embedding language acquisition in contexts that foster lifelong competencies and encourage personal development.

**Conclusions.** The findings presented in this article support the argument that English language education at the university level can and should be connected with broader developmental goals, including health literacy. By integrating health-related content into the curriculum, educators can simultaneously address students' linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and social needs while building up their worldview.

This approach aligns with the growing call for education that is not only academically challenging but also student-centred and responsive to the challenges of the modern world. It helps prepare students for real-life situations where they must navigate complex information, reflect on personal choices, and communicate effectively in multicultural, multilingual settings.

The described examples demonstrate that integrating the development of health literacy competence in English lessons enhances language competence and student well-being. It encourages critical engagement with authentic materials, supports reflective learning, and cultivates essential life skills.

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