

## APPLYING NATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES IN TRAINING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS

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**Abstract.** The paper examines the challenges of training educators to organize an inclusive educational environment in the context of the existential threat to the Ukrainian nation. It is stated that epistemic injustice, which the authors consider in the aspects of hermeneutical and testimonial injustice caused by the colonial policies of the aggressor state, must be addressed through mechanisms that ensure the resilience of the multi-ethnic Ukrainian nation. It is determined that this national identity comprises a complex of individual and community identities, the formation of which requires a decolonial and inclusive approach. The authors describe a study exploring the understanding of the historical period of the Ukrainian Sich Rifles among future teachers, students with special educational needs, parents, and community members. The study also examines the influence of this historical period on the formation of national identity and statehood in the first half of the 20th century and its connection to contemporary realities. It was found that respondents lack well-structured knowledge and skills in analytically comparing historical periods and the present. A methodology was developed and proposed for preparing educators and fostering inclusive interaction between teachers and students with hearing disorders. This methodology synthesizes elements of national-patriotic education using materials from the historical epoch of the Ukrainian Sich Rifles. The hypothesis was confirmed that the sign language used by deaf and hard-of-hearing Ukrainians contains elements of the calqued Russian language but lacks unique signs to denote many nationally significant linguistic units. The study substantiates the following tasks: equipping future educators and students with a contextual understanding of the historical era of the Ukrainian Sich Rifles, focusing on its educational and cultural dimensions during the liberation movements of the early 20th century; developing methods for analyzing the ideological foundations and cultural practices of that period for modern students and schoolchildren through the awareness and formation of generational continuity and connections; incorporating elements of patriotic education into inclusive practices; fostering a nationally conscious sign-language identity; and informing the international community about more than a century of Ukraine's efforts to assert its nationhood. The article emphasizes that access for young people with hearing disorders to the historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage of the nation is a vital aspect of their inclusion in the creation and defense of the state.

**Keywords:** teacher training, inclusion, national identity, Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, sign language, war, Ukraine.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education, as a global policy aimed at guaranteeing human rights for all and celebrating diversity, is a continuous process that reflects regional and local features and challenges, depending on cultural, historical, customary, economic, and other contexts. Ultimately, inclusion should not be viewed

as ‘the thing in itself’ (Britannica, 2020), especially if we regard persons with special educational needs and disabilities as valuable, meaningful, and effective members of communities, societies, nations, and, ultimately, the human race.

Inclusive education is closely connected with notions of identity and belonging. Generally, these concepts center on disability and diversity, but can they be expanded further? Could the threat of extermination due to national identity provide sufficient grounds to explore narratives that incorporate national and patriotic contexts into inclusion?

We, Ukrainians, fight against genocide and epistemicide, echoing Milan Kundera’s warning for the world to hear before it is too late: to liquidate a nation, the enemy takes away its memory, destroys its culture and history, then invents another culture and history until the nation forgets who it is and what it was. The world at large forgets even faster (Kundera, 1996, p. 217).

The ongoing military aggression by the Russian Federation has been reshaping political, economic, and social processes both in Ukraine and globally. Mykola Riabchuk (2024) argues that it is a ‘war of cultures’ fought over history and identity (p. 101). However, for various reasons, the genocide and epistemicide perpetrated by Russia are tolerated or euphemized by global leaders and societies. For Ukrainians, the existential task lies in modifying and implementing effective security systems to prevent acts of aggression on both international and interpersonal levels.

On the global level, Ukraine, asserting its right to sovereignty, must overcome ‘epistemic injustice’ and strengthen the nation’s resilience. The negative practices of colonial oppression by Moscow continue to impact the present, creating difficulties in articulating these issues [hermeneutic injustice] and in enabling civilized nations to comprehend evidence of genocide [testimonial injustice] (Popil, 2024). Restoring and reconnecting historical periods of Ukraine’s nation-building with the present, while employing relevant ideological principles and cultural practices in educating new generations, represents a pathway toward decolonization and epistemic justice.

There have been numerous periods in the past when Russians attempted to eliminate Ukraine’s independent spirit, authentic culture, language, and heroic history. It has now been over ten years since Russia’s most recent invasion. Ukrainian teachers, students, parents, and community members who are not directly involved in military actions can serve as guardians of Ukrainian sovereignty by fostering resilience and contributing to epistemic justice and systemic changes for a more inclusive future for all (Budnyk, 2024, pp. 272–281).

This paper highlights a project aimed at incorporating patriotic narratives into inclusive teaching, combined with a decolonizing approach. The year 2024 marked the 110th anniversary of the establishment of the Ukrainian legion in the Austro-Hungarian service – the first national formation whose members became builders of a sovereign Ukraine at the beginning of the 20th century during so-called Liberation Struggles. Their legacy was brought into teaching students and pre-service teachers, both with and without disabilities.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The present-day Ukraine, which reestablished its independence in 1991, has a long history of nation-building marked by frequent invasions from its neighbors, partitions, and annexations of territories, political unions and reunions, and colonial oppression. The Ukrainian Legion in Austro-Hungarian service [Legion Ukrainskikh Sichovykh Striltsiv (USS)] was formed in 1914, consisting of Western Ukrainians who volunteered for the Austro-Hungarian Army when World War I broke out. Their plans to eventually secure autonomy for Galicia (Western Ukraine) were realized when the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, and the independent Western Ukrainian People’s Republic (ZUNR) was established in 1918. After just three months, a union with the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR) was proclaimed. However, the newly established sovereign state soon fell to invasions from Russia and other neighboring countries.

Nevertheless, the members of the USS contributed significantly to Ukrainian statehood, education, culture, and science. Their legacy, which was suppressed by the Soviet Union, requires revitalization in the face of Russia's renewed aggression.

There are challenges in transferring concepts from Ukrainian history and language into English. For instance, the plural Ukrainian term 'striltsi' is free of gender bias, but its English translation, 'riflemen', implies that only men served in the Legion. Quite the contrary—many women were part of it, some as combat medics, and others fought alongside men. In our view, the common translation "Ukrainian Sich Riflemen" is not inclusive. Therefore, we adopt the term "Ukrainian Sich Rifles" and the abbreviation 'USS' used by Abbott & Pinak (2012).

In our analysis of the educational, cultural, and artistic activities of members of the Ukrainian Sich Rifles, the authors rely on the scholarly contributions by Mykola Lazarovych (2003), Zinovia Nahachevska (2007), Vasyl Kuchabsky (1969), Ihor Sonevtsky (1977), Wasyl Wytwycky (1954), and other researchers. Historian Mykola Lazarovych (2003) highlights structures within the Legion that encouraged self-education, cultural engagement, and preservation of their struggle's legacy. Key cultural initiatives included: educational and artistic circles such as the 'Press Quarters,' libraries, choirs, and orchestra; contributions from notable figures like T. Melen, O. Nazaruk, R. Kupchynsky, L. Lepky, D. Vitovsky, A. Lototsky, O. Sorokhety and others who created a vibrant cultural environment.

Vasyl Kuchabsky (1969, p. 133), compares the Sich Riflemen Halych-Bukovyna Kurin in the Kyiv region, a leading regular unit of the Army of the Ukrainian People's Republic which "was organized in 1917 under conditions too harsh to allow room for romanticism" notes the significant number of songs created by the Ukrainian Sich Rifles in Western Ukraine. Fruitful collaboration among riflemen Haivoronsky, Kupchynsky, and Lepky in 1915 resulted in a wealth of pieces that later became folk songs. However, by 1916–17, exhaustion, losses, and political setbacks diminished creative energies, channeling efforts entirely into the struggle.

Z. Nahachevska defines the peak of the organizational and ideological formation of the Ukrainian women's movement as the period of national liberation struggles. For the first time, women were granted full civil and political rights within their state—the Ukrainian People's Republic and its western region, Western Ukrainian People's Republic. The subsequent stage, spanning the 1920s–1930s, is characterized by the consolidation of the women's movement in Western Ukraine on "distinctly national ideological foundations" (Nahachevska, 2007, p. 84).

Educators and public activists such as Mariya Biletska, Emilia Nychai-Kumanovska, Olha Bachynska, Uliana Kravchenko, Yevheniya Yaroshynska, Olha Duchymynska, Severyna Kabarovska, Ivanna Blazhkevych, Olena Zaliznyak, Olena Stepaniv-Dashkevych, Olena Kysylivska, Milena Rudnytska, and many others worked tirelessly during the liberation struggles and formative years of a young Ukrainian state. Many women joined the ranks of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen. Sofiya Halechko, Olha Basarab-Levytska, Handzia Dmyterko, Olena Stepaniv-Dashkevych, Vasylyna Oshchypko, Olena Kuz, Pavlyna Mykhailyshyn, Olha Pidvysotska, Stefaniya Siyak, Stefaniya Novakivska, and Mariya Bachynska fought in the Women's Company of the Legion.

Another issue we address in the paper is the decolonization of Ukrainian Sign Language (USL), specifically revisiting its functionality in reflecting concepts and key terms from the period of the Liberation Struggles. This includes deconstructing lingering Soviet ideological stereotypes, filling lexical gaps, and fostering a discourse around the creation of vocabulary repressed during Soviet times.

Geopolitically, Ukraine has long been situated at the crossroads of East and West. Throughout much of its history, the territory of present-day Ukraine was under foreign domination, and the term 'Ukrainians' as a distinct national identity emerged in the late nineteenth century. In modern historiography, Ukraine has often been categorized as a 'non-historical' nation, suggesting a lack of continuity or historical legitimacy. This perspective stems largely from the loss of state institutions and the absence of a traditional representative class. However, between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, periods of semi-independence played a critical role in shaping and sustaining a unique

Ukrainian identity (Denysova, 2022).

Building on Edward Said's thesis that one of the goals of colonial education is to promote the colonizer's historical narrative and demote the native history (Said, 1994, p. 223), we emphasize that Russia has consistently 'denied' Ukraine as a dominion, or as a sovereign nation. Although this was not colonization in the strict 'orientalist' sense, we can trace Russia's colonial disdain for the historical and cultural heritage of other nations.

This disdain manifested in three ways: theft and appropriation, destruction and desecration, and marginalization and distortion of what remained, often reducing it to the comic or primitive. Through a postcolonial lens, we observe the desubjectification and exclusion of the Ukrainian people by the empire. Those *"who insisted on their distinct identity, maintained their language as a fully-fledged means of communication and strove to develop high culture beyond permitted ethnography, were reasonably perceived as enemies, a subversive force that undermined the empire's integrity and legitimacy. Ukraine thus remained a dangerous witness of a historical theft, an insurmountable obstacle in a smooth appropriation of the Rus legacy. It was indeed an alien body in the otherwise wonderful mythical picture. That nuisance should be absorbed, digested, and appropriated – or destroyed"* (Riabchuk, 2023).

Andriy Zayarnyuk highlights the West's limited knowledge about Ukraine before the invasion, noting that many scholars have now emphasized the necessity of 'decolonizing' the fields of Russian, Ukrainian, Slavic, and Eurasian studies. While other formerly colonized nations have progressed from anti-colonial struggles through neo-colonialism to post-coloniality, Ukraine's trajectory as an independent state appears to have taken the opposite path: from post-coloniality, through Russian neo-colonialism, to the anti-colonial struggle for national survival (Zayarnyuk, 2022, p. 209). The war in Ukraine shifts traditional paradigms, bringing new challenges and lessons to learn to every country and community. Decolonization is, above all, a mental process requiring colonizers, the colonized, and even 'bystanders' to acknowledge and dismantle imperialist patterns of thought (Krapfl, 2023), thus the paper discusses the problems of teaching persons with hearing disabilities and the development of Ukrainian Sign Language in a post-colonial context.

The origins of deaf pedagogy can be traced back to 1770 when a school for the deaf and teacher training courses was established in Paris. Following a visit to this school by the Austrian Emperor, a Taubstummeninstitut was opened in Vienna. From it, the method of teaching the deaf using sign language spread throughout the Austrian Empire (including Western Ukraine) and eventually reached the Russian Empire. Branches of the Vienna Institute appeared in 1805 in Romaniv (Volyn region) and in 1830 in Lviv.

Starting in 1938, the Soviet sign language – calquing Russian spoken language with an emphasis on written and manual components – was implemented in Soviet Ukraine and later in Western Ukraine after its annexation in 1939. Thus, the development of the Ukrainian Sign Language and its methodology stopped. Many signs denoting Ukrainian national culture, history, and traditions fell into disuse. Sign language became a tool for russification and colonization. For instance, the sign for the affirmative 'yes' is formed by combining the dactyl signs for 'D' + 'A' from the Russian equivalent 'da'). Some signs were altered due to phonetic similarities with the Russian language, e.g., 'insurance' is derived from 'fear' being the root word (Adamiuk, 2024, pp. 153–154).

The erosion of national identity and the construction of *homo sovieticus* formally ended in 1991, when the Ukrainian nation became a legal fact. However, the mechanisms for manifesting this identity, including the ideology of a national language, were weakly institutionalized (Bilaniuk, 2005, p. 192).

A challenging yet essential task has been the reconstruction of national identity, ensuring linguistic inclusion of Ukrainians with hearing disorders. In 2006, the Ukrainian Sign Language Laboratory was established at the Institute of Special Pedagogy and Psychology of the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine. Since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 and the consequent Russian Federation's armed aggression, efforts to revive and develop national Sign Language have accelerated. This progress has been supported by Ukraine's euro-integration policy, expanded international cooperation, and

national legislative reforms. The state's commitment to inclusivity has been outlined in the Law 'On ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the state language,' specifically in Article 4, which addresses the status of Ukrainian Sign Language and the linguistic rights of its users. Professor Lada Bilaniuk notes that the inclusion of sign language as a unique linguistic modality is a crucial step toward equality, recognition, and development of the deaf community (Bilaniuk, 2022, pp. 66–67). Ukrainian Sign Language is a natural visual-gestural linguistic system with a unique lexicon and grammar. It is used as a means of communication by sign language users in Ukraine, and everyone is guaranteed the right to freely use it in public life, learn it, and receive education in it (The Law of Ukraine On ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the state language, 2019).

Issues of education and inclusion for persons with disabilities are explored through the insights of Svitlana Kulbida (2020), Larysa Malynovych et al. (2023), Natalia Adamyuk (2024), and international experts like Ben-Ari et al., (2023), Werner & Hochman (2017).

### 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This paper showcases an inclusive education project titled "We Have Been Born Again in a Great Hour", which synthesizes elements of national-patriotic education with inclusive education practices.

The project aims to:

- Contextually introduce pre-service teachers, students, and community members to the historical period of WWI when the Legion of Ukrainian Sich Rifles was active, focusing on the organizational, educational, and cultural contributions of its members towards building the nation.
- Develop methodologies for studying ideological principles and cultural practices of the given historic period, fostering an awareness of generational continuity and interconnection.
- Apply national identity narratives in training teachers for the organization of an inclusive learning environment.
  - Integrate elements of patriotic education into inclusive practices.
  - Educate nationally-aware sign language speakers in an inclusive environment.
  - Inform the international community about the over a century-long struggle of Ukrainians to regain independence and be included in the global political processes on the backdrop of dramatic changes in the 20th century Europe.
  - Foster inclusion, cooperation, belonging, and resilience within a battered but undefeated society.

In the study the authors use systemic historical, retrospective, and epistemological analyses. The case study applies a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. The phenomenon of the USS receives attention not only from professional historians but also from students and educators, who are witnesses or participants in the ongoing Ukrainian-Moscow war. A survey conducted by the authors among students with disabilities at Kalush Special School (10 participants, age 15-17), their parents and community members (8 participants), and students of Ivano-Frankivsk Professional College (166 participants, age 15-17) in September 2024 revealed that today's youth possess fragmented knowledge about the period spanning from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. While the respondents can identify certain historical names and riflemen's songs, or recognize certain toponyms such as street names and memorials in their local areas, their understanding often lacks coherence.

The respondents frequently confused prominent members of the USS with those from the Cossack period, struggled to grasp the logic of historical events, and faced difficulties correlating Ukrainian and global historical processes. Most significantly, they lacked the analytical skills to compare that historical period with contemporary realities. The findings underscore a problem that the authors are addressing through the development of inclusive tools and activities aimed at fostering linguistic competence and national-patriotic education via cultural and artistic practices.

A distinctive feature of this project is its inclusive focus, the target groups being:

- College students majoring in Elementary Education with a focus on Special and Inclusive

Education;

- Special school students with diverse educational needs, including those with hearing disorders, Down syndrome, and autism spectrum disorders;

- Families of children and representatives of local communities.

- To create an inclusive collaborative environment accessible to all participants, the following tools and practices have been employed:

- Alternative Communication Tools. Ukrainian spoken and sign language, English translation, and subtitles in both languages.

- Universal Design for Learning;

- Inclusive Service Learning;

- Parental Engagement;

- Storytelling, art, music technologies, and ICT.

The interaction among school students with hearing disorders who use sign language, pre-service elementary teachers, and other participants has been focused on cultural heritage and local history of the national liberation movement. This approach emphasizes the connection between past and modern events, as well as efforts to shed the legacy of colonial history.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We developed a questionnaire and asked 166 pre-service teachers studying at a college (age 15-17 years), 10 students with special educational needs from a special school (age 15-17), their parents, and community members to fill it out. Although the majority of respondents were college students, 15.8% confirmed that they use or can use sign language for communication. It is worth mentioning that there is a teacher who motivates students without disabilities to learn sign language to be able to communicate with deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

The questionnaire assessed the understanding of a historical period and the significance of aspects other than military actions. The closed-ended question with three possible answers, "In honor of this event from the past, the regional council proclaimed 2024 as the Year of...?" had the correct option, "The Legion of Ukrainian Sich Rifles," chosen by 65% of respondents. Students with and without disabilities gave more correct answers than parents and community members. However, 35% of respondents did not know the answer.

Since the beginning of the war, there has been a surge in patriotic Ukrainian songs on YouTube. One of them is "We Were Born in the Great Hour," authored by Oles Babiy, a poet, essayist, and member of the USS, whose birthplace is located about 20 and 25 kilometers from the Kalush special school and Ivano-Frankivsk college, respectively. 62.8% of respondents identified him as the author of the poem. Notably, all parents and community members gave the correct answer, while all special school students chose the wrong option.

76% of all respondents selected 1914 as the year when the First World War started. However, the next prompt, "Tick the historical events that happened between 1900 and 1920 in Western Ukraine," posed some difficulties for all categories of respondents.

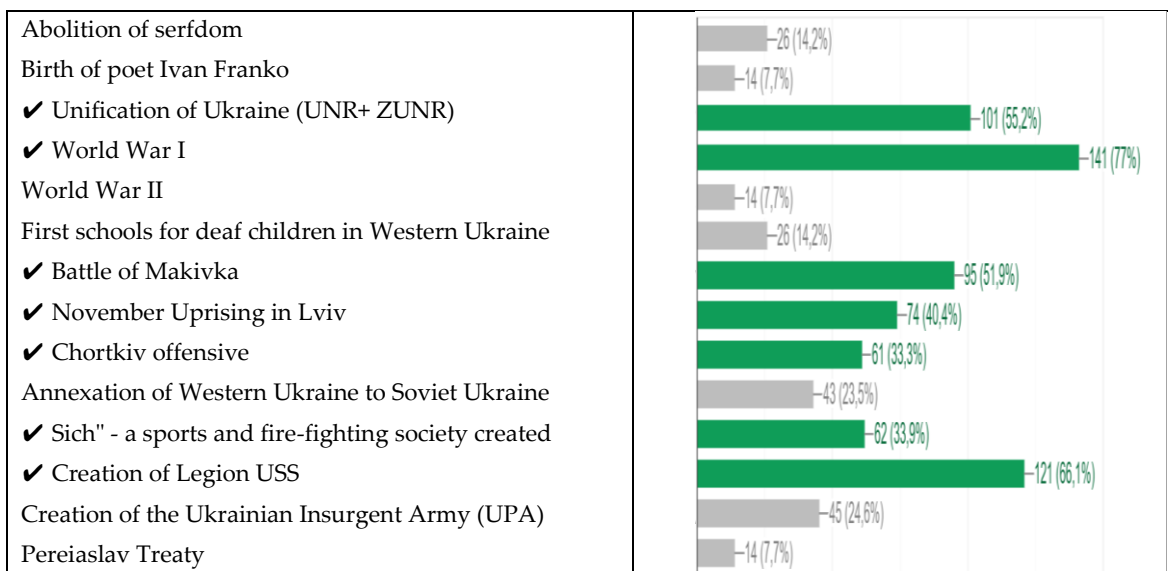


Fig. 1 Historical events that happened between 1900 and 1920 in Western Ukraine

Source: Own elaboration

When asked to identify members of the USS, the respondents mostly chose well-known male figures (two of whom were leaders from other historical periods), but they were much less certain about the women who served in the Legion and women who were not among its members, but held an active nationalist position (39.9%).

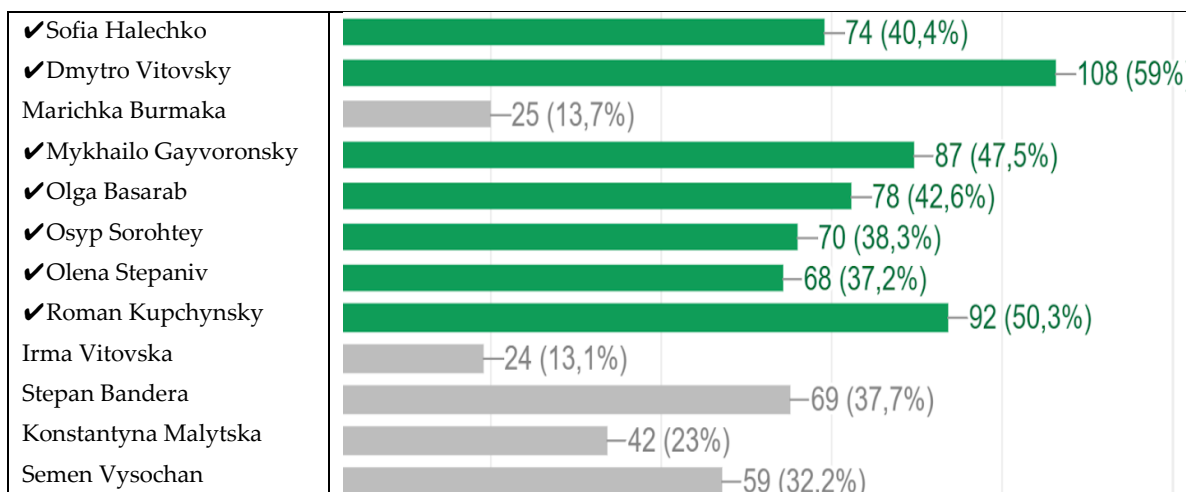


Fig. 2 Select the members of the USS

Source: Own elaboration

The majority of respondents could name “The Red Viburnum in the Meadow” and 1-2 other songs written by the USS, along with some other folk songs. However, considering that there are over a hundred of these songs, we believe that special attention should be given to familiarizing students and the general public with the educational and cultural role of the USS in nation-building, as well as the activities of prominent women and women’s organizations of that time.

The open-ended question, “Find similarities between the present and 100 years ago,” was answered by many simply with “War” or “War for sovereignty.” Some respondents could not provide an answer, and some used phrases that were obviously generated by AI.

After analyzing the responses, we planned project activities aimed at involving youth with and without disabilities in researching and learning about the heroic history of their native land, especially in educational and cultural contexts.

The project’s research directions and activities are interconnected and can be adapted based on the

target audience. Below are the main components that we explored.

### **Regional studies**

Participants carry out research on the local and regional history, toponymy, and notable personalities of the past and present. In addition to online research, they engage in uncovering family histories and meeting with local activists, historians, teachers, librarians, clergy, and other community representatives. Activities include:

- Exploring the history of streets, monuments, cenotaphs, etc. in participants' localities and surrounding areas.

- Integrating students' personal experience and results of the research in the syllabus. For instance, while studying the grammatical category of conditional sentences in the English language, students can bring some visual aids (authentic or crafted) that symbolize the history of their family or native place and produce a story, e.g. *If they visit/went/had been to my village of Pasichna you will see / would be told / would have been able to attend a bard music festival that honors the memory of Sofia Halechko, who quitted her studies in University of Graz to join the Legion and fight for her nation.*

- Hosting the "My Heroic Homeland" essay contest. Students with and without disabilities, their parents, and community members were invited to contribute a piece of writing or digital media on the topic.

- Publishing an educational and methodological guide and a collection of 93 essays (Sydoriv & Sydoriv, 2024).

### **Cultural and artistic activities**

There were many academically educated and talented individuals in the Ukrainian Sich Rifles. It is worth mentioning that the Legion enlisted volunteers, who otherwise were exempt from ordinary conscription and general drafting – high school and university students, teachers, women, etc. Their education and voluntary joining the ranks contributed to a feeling of belonging, which manifested itself in proactivity and understanding that the national, cultural, ideological and educational constituents are important for building a democratic and inclusive country.

Our project explores how the cultural and artistic heritage of this period influenced subsequent literary and artistic movements. Activities include:

- Developing virtual historical mini-tours incorporating storytelling and art techniques.
- Producing poetic video projects by the college and special school students *We Have Been Born Again on a Grand Hour* (Inclusive Education community, n.d.).

### **Small poetic genres and literature**

Rejecting the idea that "Inter arma musae silent" [*in times of war, the muses are silent*] (Sonevytsky, 1977, p. 8), the USS produced songs that transcended generations. Their songs were sung by Ukrainian Insurgent Army fighters for freedom (UPA), later in exile and, secretly, in Soviet Ukraine. These songs resurfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and proceeded to gain international acclaim after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Pink Floyd, 2022).

Many of these songs, often perceived as folk creations, were written by USS themselves, frequently set to music by professional composer Mykhailo Haivoronsky. His contributions included:

- Conducting performances of his classic music pieces even before the Legion's formation.
- Composing melodies between battles in the Carpathians and later leading a USS orchestra (Wytwycky, 1954).

This project seeks to preserve and popularize the legacy of USS songs and literature by showcasing their historical context and impact on Ukraine's cultural and national identity.

Bohdan-Ihor Antonych expressed regret about the literary potential of authors who had to call in the Legion. He noted that this generation, having experienced the war's trenches and marches, underwent a unique poetic baptism. However, he believed their creative output fell short of expectations, stating that they had already exhausted themselves and, unfortunately, prematurely sung their song. It did not soar very high; on the contrary, the results are disproportionate to their efforts and talents. (Antonycz, 1934).



Despite this critique, retrospectively, their work embodies the aspirations of a long-oppressed and unrecognized nation. These poets and writers managed to convey stories of battles and everyday life, faith and hope, triumphs and sorrows, humor, and grief. Although much of this legacy was lost or destroyed, some of it lived on through the diaspora and continues to resonate today.

The project seeks to popularize the literary and musical creativity of that era among modern students through reading, performing, and creating their works. The online initiative *Reading for Winning* features several contemporary youth singing and reading pieces of that period.

### **Education and National Identity**

The liberation struggle was not solely about battles and weapons, but also a profound expression of identity and the cultivation of national spirit and consciousness. Within the Legion, various courses for the illiterate, and a school functioned as a unique rear-line educational unit. School teachers who joined the Legion taught their comrades as well as the civil population.

In Lviv, the capital city of Eastern Galicia, an organizational center was established in 1915, that played a vital role in the rehabilitation of wounded and sick soldiers. It also organized educational courses for Ukrainian youth, supported and provided accommodation for university students, and supplied newly established schools with books and equipment. The national idea united academic youth and teachers to work toward consolidating Ukrainian ethnographic territories into an independent state.

Teachers in the 19-20th century had the status of an educated person, their national awareness serving as an example and organizational driver for a community. They theoretically substantiated the conceptual foundations of the national school, purpose, and content of education. Convinced that “enlightened patriotic womanhood is the key to a nation’s rebirth”, a teacher and a public activist Kontantyna Malytska focused on the content of education of girls and women. She traces the history of the “struggle for the girl’s education in the national spirit” in Galicia and emphasizes that the national spirit is raised both in a family and school (Ivakh & Mishchenia, 2020, p. 41). Malytska played a pivotal role in organizing relief for the Ukrainian Sich Rifles, she fundraised, and published patriotic poetry and popular articles; because of her activity, she was arrested and exiled to Siberia.

The combination of literary, educational, and nation-building efforts by the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen laid a foundation for cultural and intellectual resilience that continues to inspire and educate modern generations. The pre-service teachers who participated in our project got a deeper understanding of their role as ‘educators of generations’.

### **The role of women in the national liberation movement**

The reform of 1848 abolished serfdom in the Austrian Empire, which accelerated the urbanization of Western Ukrainian society and spurred the development of capitalist relations. These processes prompted women to move beyond the “domestic hearth” in pursuit of independent earnings, while gradually diminishing their primary role as caregivers and educators of children (Nagachevska, 2007, p. 60). The *Women’s Society*, founded by Natalia Kobrynska, marked the beginning of progress in women’s emancipation, social activity, education, and fostering national-patriotic consciousness. A prominent place in the women’s social and educational movement belonged to the activities of the *Circle of Ukrainian Women* founded by Konstantyna Malytska.

Compared to international movements, the Ukrainian women’s movement has a distinct national and unifying character. “While the women of other nations fought for social and political rights within their states, Ukrainian women under foreign occupation primarily sought these rights to advance their educational and societal development, enabling them to serve their homeland and assist in its liberation struggles” (Burachynska, 1965, p. 5).

The figure of Olena Stepaniv, as depicted by the fellow soldier and writer Oles Babiy, stands on the boundary of historical and artistic truth. Through his work, “Amid the diversity of women’s portrayals in Ukrainian literature and the tangle of standards and stereotypes, we encounter a new image of a woman who no longer wishes to be either a slave or merely a keeper of the hearth. Instead, she emerges as a woman-knight, a strong

*personality, devoted to the ideals of her homeland and ready, like men, to take on the responsibility of defending the future of her state*" (Pivtorak & Tynda, 2024, p. 233).

The project organizes readings and discussions about the life paths and creative achievements of national social and military female figures from both past and present. The educational, creative and public activity of Konstantyna Malyska was discussed with the students through a series of lessons in English and Ukrainian and extracurricular activities that covered (reading and analyzing her literary works for children, articles on national education and women rights, and translations, reciting and singing her poems, including adapting them in Ukrainian sign language (Sydoriv, 2024).

### **Decolonization and national education of sign language users**

The project *We Have Been Born Again on a Grand Hour* employs Ukrainian Sign Language alongside a spoken language. It explores narratives and means that use the historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine to develop a nationally conscious linguistic identity of a sign language user in the context of decolonization.

Dr. Svitlana Kulbida defines a national identity or a linguistic personality as an educated individual equipped with the sociocultural and linguistic skills necessary for effective communication and interaction. This personality reflects the societal environment, cultural traditions, and upbringing unique to their community and nation (Kulbida, 2020, p. 134).

In our view, while developing a linguistic personality of a USL user, teachers must take into account a national-patriotic dimension. Sign language requires a revival of its repressed past for future development. Since every language is a way of thinking that shapes one's worldview and cognitive processes, restoring its natural integrity can alleviate the "dislocation and separation" (Riabchuk, 2022, p. 233).

To cultivate the national linguistic identity of deaf and hard-of-hearing students and educators who use USL as a primary or alternative communication method, it is essential to expand and develop semantic and lexical fields that encompass the historical and cultural heritage of the nation. For instance, there is no sign for "Ukrainian Sich Rifle" in USL, it is replaced with the sign for "Cossack." As a result, lexemes such as "Sichovi Striltsi," "Sich 1," "Sich 2," and "Zaporizhian Sich" do not exist in Ukrainian Sign Language. Consequently, the entire layer of history related to the formation and defense of Ukrainian statehood, freedom, and citizenship is inaccessible to sign language users in Ukraine and abroad.

The project focuses on researching, implementing, and practicing such fields in USL to address these gaps and promote a deeper understanding of the Ukrainian heritage.

The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation has triggered processes of de-russification of Ukrainian Sign Language. An expert group within the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf is working on the 'de-Sovietization' of USL, with thousands of community members participating in discussions (Khrebet, 2023; Abramov & Lekhovitser, 2024).

This process is complex and slow but crucial for Ukrainian society. So far, over 50 signs have been officially approved and approximately 2,000 variations developed. These include a few designations for modern concepts, but there is a noticeable lack of signs denoting historical realities of Ukraine's liberation struggles or ideas related to national-patriotic education.

In the times when the Ukrainian nation faces existential danger, we believe that deaf and hard-of-hearing persons require inclusion not only in educational and socio-domestic terms. The lack of scientific and statistical data highlights the need for research and the activation of methods for national-patriotic education within the deaf community, which remains largely segregated in this regard. We argue that the policies of ignoring existing threats and isolating children with disabilities from challenging issues are counterproductive. Persons with disabilities are still considered unable or unworthy in many areas, thus we believe that they are deprived of dignity to know about the heroic past and participate in building and protecting the nation.

It is a known fact that at the beginning of World War I some 28,000 western Ukrainians volunteered

to join the Ukrainian Legion (Abbott & Pinak, 2012, p. 7). This large number was made up of those, who were not subject to compulsory wartime conscription. Can Ukrainians with hearing disorders volunteer in the army and protect their country? The army is not only about trenches and battles; it is a complex mechanism that needs various specialists for its effective functioning. Can inclusion and equity be implemented in the armed forces?

Let's consider the experience of modern Israel, where military service is mandatory for all, with few exceptions. Deaf individuals as well as persons with other disabilities can be drafted for military service or volunteer in the armed forces according to their medical profile in specific (non-combat) military specialties.

*The Special in Uniform* program not only focuses on integrating young adults with disabilities into the Israel Defense Forces but also highlights the broader societal impact of inclusion. While fostering a sense of belonging and enabling participants to reach their full potential, the program serves as a model for inclusive practices that extend beyond the military. This emphasis on abilities and social inclusion has inspired initiatives for rehabilitating at-risk youth, reflecting a holistic approach to societal integration. Complementing these efforts, research has been conducted to explore various dimensions of inclusion in the armed forces, offering valuable insights into the adaptation of individuals with disabilities to both military and civilian life (Werner & Hochman, 2017; Ben-Ari, Rosman, & Shamir, 2023).

According to Ukrainian law, individuals with disabilities are exempt from drafting during wartime but “may be accepted for military service under contract” (The Law of Ukraine on mobilization preparation and mobilization, 1991, p. 416). Therefore, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals with proven disabilities have the right to defend their homeland and serve in the armed forces. However, the declared right must also be supported by systemic improvements in the army's policy, education, and other spheres to ensure the motivation and preparedness of youth with disabilities to join military service and to be included. In other words, for a person with congenital disabilities to embrace the idea of joining the armed forces, support is needed, particularly through adequate national-patriotic education from an early age and ensuring the effectiveness of this education in line with their specific needs. We emphasize that military service for individuals with disabilities is by no means a duty but rather a right, as inclusion primarily concerns guaranteeing equal rights for everyone.

It is difficult to predict the end of the Russian military aggression that started in 2014 with the annexation of the Crimea and Donetsk areas. Unfortunately, the international organizations and systems cannot stop the aggressor. Thus, Ukraine should develop and implement new strategies for its security, and inclusive national-patriotic education of new generations is an important step where the deaf community must not be excluded. Research shows that “*children with hearing disabilities can learn and master a language like any other children. However, creating conditions to ensure the accessibility of language around the child during the first years (from birth to five) – the optimal period for language acquisition and socialization – is extremely important. (...) then children develop a sense of identity and belonging to their families, communities, and society*” (Malynovych et al., 2023).

We believe that if the upbringing of children during the sensitive period does not include patriotic historical and cultural narratives, it may be challenging to develop their active national identity. Although “*Russian aggression has actualized precisely those aspects of Ukrainian collective memory associated with ideas of national solidarity, self-sacrifice, patriotism, and armed resistance to the invader*” (Riabchuk, 2016, p. 111), individuals with special needs require additional support to access information about heroic periods of the past.

The war in Ukraine brought challenges to all horizons of expectation (political, demographic, territorial, epistemic, pragmatic), making it hard to predict what kind of understanding will emerge after the current turmoil is over. It is worth using a thoughtful combination of transnational and decolonial approaches to better understand both the war and how it is reshaping education. These two perspectives will allow us to see the war as something that is both ‘global’ and ‘local,’ ‘national’ and ‘colonial,’ ‘ethnic’ and ‘imperial.’ By combining these approaches, we can avoid two risks: first, that

focusing on decolonization might lead to narrow, nation-focused thinking, and second, that focusing on transnational ideas might create a new kind of dominance, similar to imperialism. This balanced approach helps us think more clearly and fairly about the war and its broader implications (Byford, Doak, & Hutchings, 2024, p. 353).

Thus, our project can be viewed through the lens of decolonial education – a pedagogical paradigm focused on transforming social, cultural, and political structures and building a resilient society where all its members have equal opportunities and rights to quality national education.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Education is about the future. We train teachers in a changing world based on sets of knowledge and values we believe to be universal and true. Upon graduation, they will pass their skills and understanding to future generations (Budnyk et al., 2023). These future educators will guide their students into an as-yet-unknown world. This process is called generational continuity and interconnection. But do we, as present-day educators, sufficiently include the aspirations, ideals, knowledge, and experiences of previous generations – those that were repressed and excluded?

The events of the national upheaval of the past should interest not only historians. The political processes of forming new state entities at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded in the turbulent context of military operations, strategic and situational alliances, revolutionary and populist ideas, inadequate communication, mass inertia, personal ambitions, and subjective decisions of leaders. Unlike its adversaries, who laid claims to its territory, the Western Ukrainian state lacked both international diplomatic levers of influence and a well-organized army capable of unifying its lands through force. A similar situation was in the Ukraine People's Republic (UNR) (Hai-Nyzhnyk, 2019, pp. 29, 35). National statehood was lost for many decades and the heroic deeds of Ukraine's sons and daughters were stifled amidst near-total indifference from world leaders.

In the Soviet Union, the products of national educational and cultural activity were repressed and replaced with a new colonial ideology. Russification, a central tool of this colonial project, sought to erase Ukraine's national identity by imposing the Russian language, culture, and ideology as superior. Even now, traces of this systemic oppression remain visible, such as in the sign language used within Ukraine's deaf community, where elements of Russian influence persist.

Putin's Russia functions as a fascist imperialist empire, utilizing its superior resources to dominate, suppress, and reshape the identities of nations under its control. Ukraine, rich in cultural and historical heritage, has become one of its primary targets. The situation today mirrors these colonial patterns, as an imperialist force attempts to crush Ukraine's sovereignty and independence. The goal remains the same: to reduce Ukraine to the status of a colony, stripping it of agency and transforming its people into tools for the empire's ambitions. This ongoing struggle highlights the enduring impact of historical colonialism and the resilience of Ukraine in preserving its identity against such forces (Kruhlii, 2023).

The realities of the current Russo-Ukrainian war demand a qualitative renewal of approaches to national-patriotic education for youth. The narratives of struggles for statehood a century ago remains insufficiently accessible to the deaf community. The formation of a national linguistic identity and the establishment of patriotically oriented inclusive centers for users of Ukrainian Sign Language is a pressing need of our time. Inclusion entails safeguarding the rights of individuals to education and active participation in the life of their community, society, and country, including the defense of the state.

The project *"We Have Been Born Again in a Great Hour"* aims to create an inclusive space for collaboration among future educators, students with special educational needs, their families, and community members while exploring the historical and cultural material of the Ukrainian Sich Rifles period and relating it to the present. The challenges of the current war demand an academic, cultural, linguistic, and political deconstruction of the post-colonial paradigm, alongside the creation of new

narratives to strengthen societal and national resilience. In this endeavor, Ukrainians rely on the support of the international community—including political leaders, scholars, and activists. At the same time, we urge them to make an effort to understand Ukraine's identity, history, and culture as authentic and multilayered. Denying the complex identities and personhoods of Ukrainians functions as a form of epistemic imperialism (Sonevsky, 2022, p. 28).

Decolonization is necessary on multiple levels, including within international sign language systems. For example, an analysis of the ASL Sign Language Dictionary online portal highlights a definition of Ukraine steeped in 'imperial knowledge,' as described by Mykola Riabchuk (2023). The entry says: "(...) *a republic in southeastern Europe; formerly a European Soviet; the center of the original Russian state which came into existence in the ninth century*" (SignASL, n.d.).

This definition reflects a distorted, colonial narrative. In the ninth century, neither Russia nor Ukraine existed as distinct entities. Instead, the region was home to a federation of Slavic tribes collectively known as Kyiv Rus'. Notably, Rus' is not synonymous with Russian, nor should Ukraine's history be reduced to a prelude to Russia's (Pritsak & Reshetar, 1963, p. 13). Kyiv, the capital of modern Ukraine, was the political, cultural, and religious center of the original Rus' state. Recognizing this distinction is critical to challenging imperialist narratives and affirming Ukraine's rightful place in history as an independent and foundational cultural entity.

Providing youth with hearing disorders access to the historical, cultural, and linguistic heritage of their nation is a vital aspect of their inclusion in the creation and defense of the state.

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Сидорів Сергій, Сидорів Лідія. Застосування наративів національної ідентичності у підготовці інклюзивних вчителів. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 12 (1) (2025), 119-134.

У статті висвітлено проблеми підготовки педагогів до організації інклюзивного освітнього середовища в умовах екзистенційної загрози українській нації. Константовано, що епістемічна несправедливість, яку автори розглядають в аспектах герменевтичної та свідченневої несправедливості, і яка спричинена колоніальною політикою ворога має долатися механізмами, які забезпечують резилентність поліетнічної української нації. Визначено, що ця національна ідентичність складається з комплексу індивідуальних і спільнотних ідентичностей, формування яких потребує деколоніального та інклюзивного підходу. Авторами описано дослідження розуміння майбутніми вчителями, учнями з особливими освітніми потребами, батьками і учасниками спільнот історичного періоду діяльності Легіону Українських січових стрільців, його вплив на формування національної ідентичності і державності в першій половині ХХ століття, та зв'язок із сучасністю. З'ясовано, що респонденти (якими були здебільшого майбутні педагоги) не володіють систематизованими знаннями і навичками аналітичного порівняння історичного періоду і сучасності. Авторами розроблено і запропоновано методіку підготовки та інклюзивної взаємодії педагогів і учнів з порушеннями слуху, яка синтезує елементи національно-патріотичного виховання на матеріалі історичної епохи Українських січових стрільців. Підтверджено гіпотезу, що жестова мова, якою користуються українці з порушеннями слуху, містить елементи калькованої російської мови, але не має унікальних жестів для конотації багатьох національно-забарвлених мовних одиниць. Дослідження обґрунтовує завдання: контекстуального ознайомлення майбутніх педагогів і школярів з історичним

періодом формування феномену Українського січового стрілецтва, освітніми, просвітницькими аспектами діяльності національних і громадських персон у період Визвольних змагань на початку ХХ століття; вироблення методик дослідження ідейних засад і культурних практик стрілецтва для сучасних студентів і школярів через усвідомлення і формування наступності та зв'язку поколінь; упровадження елементів патріотичного виховання в інклюзивні практики української освіти; формування національно свідомої жестомовної особистості; інформування міжнародних спільноти про більш як сторічний досвід актуалізації української нації. Акцентовано, що доступ молоді з порушеннями слуху до історичної, культурної і мовної спадщини нації слугує дієвим аспектом її інклюзії у творення і захист держави.

**Ключові слова:** підготовка вчителів, інклюзія, національна ідентичність, Українські Січові Стрільці, жестова мова, війна, Україна.