

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLTEACHERS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES LESSONS

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Summary

The aim of the article is to reveal the potential of the academic discipline Foreign Language for Special Purposes (FLFSP) in the development of soft skills of future primary school teachers. The objectives of the study are to analyze scientific sources on the topic of the research; to identify the soft skills important for future primary school teachers; to present a lesson sample of how learning FLFSP can contribute to the development of soft skills in students. The research methods that are used in the article include the method of critical analysis of scientific literature – to analyze scientific sources on the problem under study and identify the most important soft skills; the method of studying and summarizing the positive experience of the development of students' soft skills while learning FLFSP – to provide a sample lesson. The research has revealed that the most important soft skills that Ukrainian future primary school teachers should possess are: communication, problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, decision making, initiative, critical thinking and creativity. The academic discipline Foreign Language for Special Purposes has a significant potential in the development of the soft skills mentioned. Studying this discipline involves a combination of different forms of organizing students' learning activities in the classroom (individual, pair and group work), a combination of interrelated speech activities (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), teaching methods (role play, group debates, discussion, project work, public speaking, maintaining a blog or a discussion forum), and educational materials. The analysis of the impact of different methods of teaching a foreign language on the development of students' soft skills may be a promising direction for future studies.

Key words: teaching methods, learning activities, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, decision making, critical thinking.

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1. Introduction

Ukrainian educational system is traditionally aimed at hard skills development. But in today's world having only hard skills is not enough to deal with multiple varied tasks that employees face every day. Soft skills are becoming crucial to succeed in different professional areas. Therefore, in educational environment, the emphasis on the development of soft skills is becoming increasingly important. An analysis of scientific sources proves that the development of soft skills of university students has not been considered as one of the main priorities in the

higher education system of Ukraine for decades (*Martyniuk et al., 2023*). This issue is urgent for future teachers as well. The modern world requires not only good knowledge and pedagogical skills, but also developed soft skills, such as communication, empathy, interpersonal interaction, creativity, leadership, adaptability and others. Along with professional competencies well-developed soft skills are especially important for future teachers' careers perspectives and successful realization in their professional activity since they will not only have to work in educational establishments, cooperate with school administration, other teachers and their pupils' parents, perform their main function in teaching different school subjects to school students, but they will also have to develop soft skills in younger generations of citizens.

Today, there are two approaches to developing soft skills of university students. The first is to teach directly, by introducing separate courses as part of the variable component of the curriculum. For example, a number of foreign universities, namely Harvard University, Stanford Research Institute and others, have a team building course. The second approach is to integrate training of soft skills into the teaching of hard skills, that is to realize the potential of academic disciplines. This approach is most common in Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEIs). We believe that within this context the classes in Foreign Language for Special Purposes (FLFSP) have the potential to become an effective platform for developing these important skills.

The aim of this article is to reveal the potential of the academic discipline English Language for Special Purposes in the development of soft skills of future primary school teachers. **The objectives** of the study are to analyse scientific sources on the topic of the research; to identify the soft skills important for future primary school teachers; to present a lesson sample of how learning FLFSP can contribute to the development of soft skills in students.

Research methods. In this work the method of critical analysis of scientific literature is used – to analyze scientific sources on the problem under study and identify the most important soft skills; the method of studying and summarizing the positive experience of the development of students' soft skills while learning FLFSP is used – to provide a sample lesson.

2. Literature review

The concept of soft skills was studied by a number of foreign (L. Baileyand, R. Carney, A. Lazarus, L. H. Lippman, K. A. Moore, R. Ryberg) and Ukrainian researchers (N. A. Dluhunovych, N. V. Hrona, O. Y. Kravets, K. O. Koval, T. A. Kuptsova, A. Martyniuk, I. I. Romanko). Due to the multidimensional nature of soft skills in scientific studies and reports of global non-governmental organizations, "soft skills" had different names (life skills, future work skills, generic skills, 21st century skills, interpersonal skills or people skills) but all of them have the same meaning (*Didenko, 2021: 267*). There is also lack of consensus about the definition of the term "soft skills". Scholars define this concept from different perspectives and in the context of their research topic. In general, as they are more about how people behave and interact with others, soft skills can be defined as the personal attributes and social abilities that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects (*Ambarak Salih, 2020: 96*).

Ukrainian researchers N. Hrona and others believe that in the context of training future primary school teacher "soft skills" are a set of personal skills aimed at the successful, productive teaching of primary school pupils, the ability to communicate effectively with direct participants in the educational process (pupils) and indirect (colleagues, administration, pupils' parents) (*Hrona et al., 2022*).

3. Skills to develop in future primary school teachers

It is quite important for our study to identify the soft skills important for future primary school teachers' career perspectives. Their successful employment and work in educational institutions, which involves constant interactions with the administration, colleagues, representatives of other professional groups, and students' require different abilities. According to the survey that we conducted among colleagues and school teachers, the most important for future primary school teachers are the skills which assist them in performing their direct functions related to the duties of a classroom teacher. In particular, the abilities to communicate, adapt to new conditions and requirements, persuade people, make decisions, solve problems, work in a team, and critical thinking were identified as the most important skills.

The results of the survey largely coincide with the requirements for the general competences that primary school teachers should have, which are specified in the Professional Standard for the profession "Primary school teacher of general secondary education" accepted by the Ukrainian Government. Namely, civic, social, cultural, leadership and entrepreneurial competences. These competences include the ability to act responsibly and consciously, be ready for interpersonal interaction, team work, the ability to appreciate diversity and multiculturalism, express themselves creatively, make effective decisions, generate ideas, solve problems and take initiative (*Profesiynyi standart, 2020: 6*).

4. The potential of the English Language for Special Purposes classes

The aim of the study is to reveal the potential of the English Language for Special Purposes classes in the development of soft skills of future primary school teachers. In our opinion, among all training courses the foreign language is undoubtedly one of the most effective disciplines because it offers a unique and comprehensive learning experience that transcends the boundaries of language itself. Language teaching involves a combination of different forms of organizing students' learning activities in the classroom (individual, pair and group work), a combination of interrelated speech activities (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), teaching methods (role play, group debates, discussion, project work, public speaking, maintaining a blog or a discussion forum), and educational materials that promote the development of active communication, leadership, team-work, creativity, foster empathy, cultural awareness, problem-solving, adaptability, and other soft skills.

According to H. Kornius, the key point is to organically integrate diverse activities and teaching strategies (*Kornius, 2020: 104*). Therefore, before planning a class, teachers have to understand how soft skills are developed, choose what soft skills they want their students to master, and select corresponding instructional methods and tools to model a situation that reproduces real-life scenarios and professionally oriented situations in which soft skills could be naturally acquired.

5. Sample Lesson

Here is an example of methods, tasks and educational material that contribute to the development of students' soft skills in FLFSP classes.

The teacher announces: The topic of the lesson is "Characteristics of English Language Learners". Today we are going to speak about different age groups of English language learners.

Our objectives are: to define the term “young learners”, to analyse the differences of foreign language learners age groups, to develop reading and speaking skills on the topic.

1. Split into groups of 2–3 and brainstorm on the useful vocabulary on the topic of the lesson. Time is limited. In 2 minutes, the students share their ideas. The ability of group work is developed.

2. Answer the following questions:

- What students are called young learners (YL)?
- Do you remember yourself in primary school?
- What was your favourite subject at school? Why?
- Did you like your foreign language lessons back then?
- What activities did you like to do at that age?
- What activities do you like doing in your English classes now?
- In your opinion, what are the differences in teaching a foreign language to YL, adolescents and adults?

adolescents and adults?

- What age group is the most difficult to teach English to?

The students answer the questions, make assumptions and explain their opinions. The ability to think critically, express one’s point of view and listen to other opinions is developed.

3. The teacher distributes handouts containing a table of age groups learners’ differences and sets a task: Skim the information in the table and find out if your assumptions on the differences in teaching a foreign language to YL, adolescents and adults were correct. The abilities to process new information, find the key information quickly, and critical thinking are developed.

4. Read the information in the table carefully. Get ready to say what peculiarities of different age groups in foreign language teaching and learning are new or surprising to you. Do you agree with the description given to students of your age group?

According to Harmer (2007), the main differences of age groups learners are the following (Table 1).

Table 1

Age Groups Learners’ Differences

Young Children	Adolescents	Adults
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They respond although they do not understand. - They learn from everything around them: they learn indirectly rather than directly. - They understand mostly when they see, hear, touch and interact rather than from explanations. - Abstract concepts are difficult to deal with. - They generally display a curiosity about the world and an enthusiasm for learning a language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Despite their success in language learning, they are seen like problematic students. - They commit passionately when they are engaged. - Most of them start to understand the need for learning. - Attention span is longer as a result of intellectual development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They can engage with abstract thought - They have a whole range of (positive or negative) life and learning experiences. - They have expectations about the learning process and they have their own patterns of learning - They are more disciplined than the other age groups and know how to struggle on despite boredom

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They like talking about themselves and respond to learning that uses their lives as the main topic. - They love discovering things, making or drawing things, using their imagination, moving from one place to another, solving puzzles. - They have a short attention span; they can easily get bored after 5–10 minutes. - Teachers should have a rich repertoire of activities to help young children receive information from a variety of sources and plan a range of activities for a given time period. - Teachers should work with students individually or in groups - Teachers need to be aware of the students’ interests to motivate them. - The classroom should be colorful and bright with enough room for different activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They can use many different ways of studying and practicing language. - They search for identity and self-esteem; thus they need to feel good about themselves and valued. - They need teacher and peer approval and are sensitive to criticism of their own age group. - Teachers should link teaching to their everyday interests and experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlike other groups, they know why they are learning and what they want to have at the end. - They sustain a level of motivation even for a distant goal, which is difficult for the other groups. - They can be critical of teaching methods or they may feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar methods. - Older ones worry that their intellectual powers diminish by age. - They have a longer concentration span to continue an activity than the other groups. - Teachers should consider their (positive or negative) learning experiences.
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6. After reading the students answer the questions in 5. Each student expresses his / her point of view and gives reasons for it. This helps to develop skills in expressing their own opinions and listening to others.

7. For the next activity the teacher splits the students into 3 groups with approximately the same level of foreign language. Each group is appointed to one of the age groups and has a task: to prepare convincing arguments and make a speech that will persuade the others that their age group of students is the most interesting to work with. Three students with a high foreign language level are appointed by the teacher as arbitrators who will listen and assess the speeches. They should vote for the group, whose speech was the most thorough, factual, lexically and grammatically correct.

Obviously, some students will be disappointed if their group is not the best. They may even argue about it. This is how such soft skills as resilience to criticism, negotiation in order to prove the validity of one’s opinion, compassion, objective self-esteem, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and conflict resolution skills are developed. Arbitrators must have analytical thinking, be able to listen carefully, think critically, be able to express their opinions correctly and communicate the decision they have made. The students also develop their abilities to persuade, defend their opinions, and solve problems.

As a homework the students will have to write a blog on the topic “Teaching English to young learners: how I see it”. This provides an opportunity to express their thoughts and share them with the others.

6. Conclusions

The research has revealed that the most important soft skills that Ukrainian future primary school teachers should possess are: communication, problem-solving, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, decision making, initiative, critical thinking and creativity. The academic discipline Foreign Language for Special Purposes has a significant potential in the development of the soft skills mentioned. Studying this discipline involves a combination of different forms of organizing students' learning activities in the classroom (individual, pair and group work), a combination of interrelated speech activities (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), teaching methods (role play, group debates, discussion, project work, public speaking, maintaining a blog or a discussion forum), and educational materials. The analysis of the impact of different methods of teaching a foreign language on the development of students' soft skills may be a promising direction for future studies.

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