

THE ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS IN TEACHER TRAINING IN THE MODERN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Iryna Malynovska

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Philology and Translation,
State University of Trade and Economics, Ukraine
e-mail: i.malynovska@knute.edu.ua, orcid.org/0000-0002-0867-3715

Iryna Barantsova

Doctor of Philosophy, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Department of Germanic Philology and Methods of Teaching
Germanic Languages, Bohdan Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University, Ukraine
e-mail: irinabarantsova25@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-8660-8089

Summary

In the article, the authors analyse the concept of ‘soft skills’ and define the role of soft skills in the professional training of teachers in the modern educational process. It is established that these skills include the ability to empathise, active listening, constructive communication, conflict management and leadership qualities that contribute to the effectiveness of the teaching process, stimulate active interaction between participants in the educational process and contribute to the successful achievement of educational and professional goals. It is noted that developed soft skills allow a teacher to more effectively establish interaction with students, colleagues and the administration of a higher education institution. The ability to communicate, motivate and manage emotions creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust, which has a positive impact on the success of students and forms their positive attitude to learning in general.

In the article, the authors analyse the experience of other countries in developing soft skills for teachers, in particular in the Scandinavian countries, Singapore, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

The study found that in order to develop soft skills in teachers, it is necessary to attend trainings and seminars, which will help teachers improve their dialogue skills, better understand the needs of students to resolve conflict situations and create a positive educational environment; create conditions for the professional growth of teachers, recognition of their achievements; encourage teachers to share experiences and cooperate with colleagues, which will help improve their teamwork and conflict resolution skills.

Key words: skills, educational process, soft skills, teachers. Higher education institutions, professional development.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, the educational process is undergoing significant changes, which requires teachers to have not only a high level of professional knowledge, but also the development of soft skills. The analysis of scientific research suggests that soft skills include interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, teamwork, creativity, adaptability and many other skills that

contribute to effective communication and interaction (*Cinque, 2017*). The development of soft skills in teachers is a long-term and complex process that requires joint efforts by educational institutions, the state and teachers themselves. It is important to create conditions for continuous professional development, provide access to modern learning resources and support innovative approaches.

Today, there is no denying the importance of socialisation and individual qualities, which, along with professional skills, form the image of a progressive teacher. At the same time, the issue of bringing the potential of professional and flexible skills to a common denominator remains open.

To achieve the objectives of scientific research, a general scientific methodology was used, which reveals the content and form of teacher education. The system-functional analysis provides a complete theoretical and methodological description of soft-skills in the pedagogical cluster of education.

The purpose of the research is to analyse the reorientation of modern educational strategies from classical pedagogical paradigms based on classical hard skills to innovative pedagogical formats dominated by soft skills and to determine the role of soft skills in teacher training in the modern educational process.

2. Analysis of publications and the purpose of the study

In the scientific literature, one can find many definitions of such terms as ‘competences’, ‘skills’ and ‘soft skills’. This is reflected, in particular, in the works of such researchers as L. Kar-tashova, I. Gevlich, L. Gevlich, Y. Katelia, O. Kurinnyi, I. Fedulova, K. Koval, L. Kibenko and others. The term ‘soft skills’ is often used interchangeably with such concepts as ‘21st century skills’ (in OECD documentation) or future work skills. Thus, researcher A. Cinque gives the following definition: ‘Soft skills are a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills. Soft skills help people to adapt and behave in a positive way so that they can effectively cope with the challenges of their professional and everyday life’.

3. Analysing the definition of ‘soft skills’ and their role in the professional training of university teachers

Soft skills are interpreted as social and interpersonal competences that are necessary for effective communication and cooperation in the educational sphere of higher education institutions (strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2021-2031, 2020). These skills include the ability to empathise, active listening, constructive communication, conflict management and leadership skills that contribute to the effectiveness of the teaching process, stimulate active interaction between participants in the educational process and contribute to the successful achievement of educational and professional goals.

As noted in the study (*Kizi, 2020*), soft skills are essential personality characteristics that help to establish effective interaction with other people and adapt to different situations. For a teacher, these skills become especially important, since the educational process is largely based on communication and interaction with students. An analysis of the results of modern scientific research makes it possible to conclude that the main soft skills required by teachers include:

1. Emotional intelligence – the ability to understand and manage one's emotions, as well as to recognise the emotions of students to create a favourable educational environment.

2. Communication skills – the ability to convey information clearly and understandably, actively listen and provide feedback to students.
3. Creativity – the ability to create innovative approaches to teaching, which allows you to better engage students and adapt the educational process to their needs.
4. Teamwork skills – necessary for cooperation with colleagues and administration to organise joint projects.
5. Adaptability and flexibility – the ability to quickly adapt to changes in curricula, technologies, and the needs of modern youth.

A similar opinion is shared by scientists in their study (Bates, 2018), noting that a teacher needs continuous professional development and training. Of course, we are not referring to the teaching profession, which ends with the acquisition of an educational qualification and the necessary fundamental professional skills. Improvement of professional skills is ensured by flexible skills.

It is worth noting that in order for soft skills to become an integral part of a teacher's professional activity, it is necessary to constantly improve these skills and implement them through participation in professional communities and conferences (exchange of experience with colleagues helps to develop communication skills and enrich pedagogical experience); analyse their own activities and reflect (reflection on their behaviour and the results of interaction with students helps teachers to better understand their strengths and weaknesses); use technology to improve learning (the use of interactive teaching methods and digital platforms contributes to the creation of an inclusive educational environment and increases the engagement of students).

4. Impact of Soft Skills on the quality of the educational process

Based on the analysis of a wide range of sources and scientific works on the problem under study, the dominant conceptual understanding of the problem is that Soft skills affect the quality of the educational process in several important aspects:

1. Increasing the motivation of students – teachers with developed communication skills and emotional intelligence are able to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom, which increases the motivation of students to learn.
2. Improved understanding of the material – the ability of the teacher to adapt the way of presenting the material to the needs of different students contributes to better knowledge acquisition and the development of critical thinking (Kondrashova, 2024).
3. Creating partnerships with students – empathy and active listening skills help teachers establish trusting relationships with students, which contributes to the formation of a partnership model of learning (Kondrashova, 2020).

Soft skills of a university teacher give him or her the opportunity to gain advantages in the educational process and in the educational market, provided they are skilfully used (Kizi, 2020). Soft skills also play an important role in the organisation of the educational process of future specialists, influencing their formation as members of society. Teachers who have the appropriate qualities ultimately contribute to the creation of a proper image of the institution and its competitiveness in the education market. Developed soft skills allow the teacher to more effectively establish interaction with students, colleagues and the administration of the higher education institution. The ability to communicate, motivate and manage emotions creates an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust, which has a positive impact on students' academic performance and shapes their positive attitude to learning in general. For example, a teacher who has active listening skills is able to better understand the needs of the student and

find approaches to each, which contributes to better knowledge acquisition. It is also worth noting that soft skills play an important role in creating the image of a higher education institution. Teachers who demonstrate a high level of empathy, creativity and teamwork become ambassadors of the university, representing it not only within the educational process but also at external events, conferences and educational forums. This helps the higher education institution to be visible among others and attract more applicants interested in a high-quality and innovative approach to education.

Soft skills also help teachers to adapt to modern labour market requirements and changes in education. This is important in the context of digitalisation and the integration of the latest technologies into the educational process, as skills such as flexibility, lifelong learning and critical thinking allow teachers to quickly master new teaching methods and use modern educational platforms. This not only increases the level of professional competence of the teacher, but also provides students with access to relevant knowledge and practices. Ultimately, the presence of developed soft skills in a teacher is the basis for the formation of a professional culture in students preparing to enter the labour market. A teacher who demonstrates the importance of communication skills, collaboration and problem-solving by his or her own example becomes a role model. This contributes to the formation of the same traits in future professionals that are necessary for their future professional activities and successful integration into society (*Chykurova, 2022*).

5. Experience of other countries in developing soft skills for teachers

The development of soft skills among teachers is a priority in many countries, as it helps to improve the quality of education and make the educational process more efficient. Let us consider some approaches and initiatives in this area:

In Finland, which is considered one of the leaders in education, special attention is paid to the development of emotional intelligence and creativity in teachers. Professional development programmes for teachers include trainings on emotional resilience, effective communication and teamwork. Teachers learn how to create a friendly and supportive environment in an educational institution, which contributes to better learning by students.

In Singapore, teachers are trained as part of the 21st Century Competencies programme, which includes the development of leadership, critical thinking and emotional intelligence skills. Much attention is paid to coaching, meaning that teachers are trained to work with students as mentors, helping them develop not only academic knowledge but also social skills.

Studying Canada's experience, it is worth noting that teacher training programmes focus on the integration of soft skills through practical experience. Teachers take part in workshops that include modelling classroom situations, conflict resolution, and stress management techniques. This helps teachers to be prepared for unforeseen situations in the teaching process.

In Australia, teachers undergo specialised courses that include training in classroom management, empathy, and the use of technology to create an interactive learning environment. As part of the Teacher Quality Reforms programme, teachers learn to create partnerships with students and develop critical and creative thinking skills. An important aspect is the emphasis on cultural sensitivity, which helps teachers work in a multicultural environment (*Sheretiuk, 2023*).

In Japan, the approach to developing soft skills among teachers is focused on traditional values and the concept of 'omotenashi' – a culture of hospitality. Teachers learn empathy and respect for students, as well as the ability to create a comfortable learning environment. This is combined with modern training in audience management and creativity, which helps teachers to effectively solve problems in the educational process.

Comparing the practice of developing soft skills in higher education institutions in the Scandinavian countries, we observe the following trend: in Sweden, the focus is on developing leadership skills, analysis and timely response; in Norway, critical thinking, communication and conflict resolution skills; in Denmark, presentation and self-improvement skills. In all three countries, the development of skills such as complex problem solving, information analysis, collaboration, continuous learning and empathy is practiced.

6. Results of the study

The development of soft skills in higher education teachers is one of the most important factors in ensuring high quality education. Pedagogical experience and analysis of scientific research allow us to determine the importance of soft skills for a university teacher in the educational process:

- Effective communication: the ability to convey information clearly and understandably, to lead discussions, and to motivate students to learn.
- Emotional intelligence: understanding one's own emotions and those of others, the ability to empathise and create a positive educational environment.
- Creativity: the ability to think outside the box, generate new ideas and approaches to learning (*Sheretiuk, 2023*).
- Leadership skills: the ability to organise the educational process, motivate students, and work in a team (*Bates, 2018*).
- Adaptability: the ability to quickly adapt to changes, use new technologies and teaching methods.

In order to develop soft skills, teachers need to attend trainings and seminars, which will help them improve their dialogue skills, better understand the needs of students to resolve conflict situations and create a positive educational environment; create conditions for professional growth of teachers, recognition of their achievements; encourage teachers to share experiences and cooperate with colleagues, which will help improve their teamwork and conflict resolution skills; apply skills in practice (perform tasks that involve the use of knowledge in the workplace, because it is regular practice combined with feedback that allows you to adjust and improve skills, which eventually transforms into a sustainable skill).

7. Conclusions

The development of soft skills is a key component in the training of a modern teacher. Possession of these skills allows teachers not only to improve the quality of teaching, but also helps to create a productive and favourable educational environment for students. It is through the development of soft skills that teachers can more effectively adapt to rapid changes in education and maintain a high level of professionalism in the modern educational process. The development of soft skills in higher education teachers is of strategic importance both for the personal professional growth of teachers and for ensuring the competitiveness of higher education institutions and training specialists who will be able to meet the challenges of the modern world (*Cinque, 2017*).

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