

On the Formation of “Soft Skills” as the Equivalent of Professional Competencies: A Forecast of Educational Trends

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The authors of the article study the soft skills formation in the framework of professional competencies. The aim of the article is to formulate the soft skills characteristic, its components, as well as to analyze methods and techniques of soft skills training and development prospects in the conditions of the world's globalization, technical progress, economic and political changes. For this purpose, one used the following methods: the analysis of existing scientific publications on the topic of “soft skills” in the educational space and their correlation with professional competences. The comparative method was used in the analysis of soft skills formation of Ukrainian education and European practices. In the analysis of soft skills individual components, the inductive method was used. The results of the study have led to the understanding of soft skills prospect as a fundamental requirement in the modern labor market. The soft skills are universal needs of today's education.

Keywords: soft skills, education, skills, communication, work, profession

INTRODUCTION

The importance of this topic has multiple preconditions. The first is the educational crisis in Ukraine. Students often change courses and faculties, work outside of their specialty, they often choose non-academic courses that are increasingly popular on the Internet. Such courses give a quick specialization in a few months and teach basic skills. And with the development of creative industries, more and more people want to work remotely in art, design, and IT. This field requires creativity, teamwork, communication, and

time management skills. The second is the globalization and the scientific and technological development of the society. The growing replacement of people with jobs and “hard skills” is rapid but it is not as important as the “soft skills”. Moreover, the emergence of more jobs that require communication, creativity, self-organization, etc. The need for an effective communication in society is undoubted. The education system is adjusting to the demands of modernity. The adjustment of the educational system to the needs of modernity are evident. All levels of education pursue the goal of cultivating a harmonious human being, a unit of society. But the question remains how education will be transformed and what trends will prevail in the educational environment.

The scientific achievement of “soft skills” research has a long history. For a decade, scientists around the world have been paying attention to soft skills and their formation in universities, colleges, research in mastering certain professions, the demand of recruiters, and national educational programs. Ukrainian researchers paid much attention to the essence of “soft skills”. Thus, the scientist (Savchenko, 2021) studied the role of soft skills in higher education. The author paid special attention to the importance of university policy and its main principles. Since it is in the regulations that the success or failure of educational programs is laid down (Kolyada, Kravchenko, 2020) investigated the practical experience of soft skills formation in higher education institutions as well. The formation of these skills should take place not only in classrooms but also in thematic centers where students can come independently. In terms of the higher education, a research was conducted by (Vizniuk, 2021). This researcher analyzed the observance of academic virtue directly related to the formation and application of soft skills. The development of soft skills in college students was explored by (Tkachuk, Sosnovenko, 2019). The authors noted the role of European countries and their support for Ukraine in the academic field. But in the Ukrainian academic space, there are works with a narrower scope. Kirdan & Kirdan, (2021) analyze the argumentation on the formation of soft skills in the context of the criteria for assessing the quality of education programs. (Medyns'ka, 2020) investigated soft skills in the field of hospitality.

In the foreign study's authors are interested in soft skills applied aspects, for example, the research on the relationship with recruiters and HR managers on labor issues. This research was conducted by (Calanca et al., 2019). They studied soft skills (team players) based on job openings in the labor market. The combination of analytics and education is analyzed by (Lnenicka, 2022). Learning science, humanities, and creativity have different approaches and methods. Therefore, Piirto's work (Piirto, 2021) is of particular interest precisely because of the focus on creative learning and the proposed practices that go beyond soft skills. The foreign experience has also general works, for example, as didactics of soft skills. The current state of this problem was explored by Olugbenga & Oluwatosin (Olugbenga & Oluwatosin, 2022). The authors apprehend the soft skills as a nineteenth-century priority. But the success or failure of professional competence depends not only on the skilled bearer but also on a society filled with stereotypes, discrimination, sexism, etc. In the work of (Succi, Wieandt, 2019), its assessment of graduates' soft skills and active interest in interpersonal communication, is general. The assessment of interpersonal skills has been addressed by (Bak et al. 2019). Thus, (Ibarraran, 2014) examines the skills and job search of Latino children from poor families. The factor of economic inequality between individuals and whole cities was addressed by (Alabdulkareem et al. 2018). There is a devastation of the middle class, the condition of some people on their “basic” skills, and the growth of others by increasing soft skills. It is the skills link that shows us the dependence of evolution from one occupation to another, how individual occupations change their working environments.

Ponnudurai & Ponniah (2020) recognize a particular role in adapting the educational system. With the coming Fourth Industrial Revolution, the university cannot be what it used to be. Universities need to work on students with quality professionals who will respond to the demands of modernity and become relevant workers. In addition, the educational system must take the best of the modern revolution and use electronic devices in teaching. The work of (Ehlers, Kellermann 2019) is close in subject matter. The research takes into account not only skills from computers and the latest technology but also other skills needed by contemporary people. Thus, that technologization and industrialization are not decisive in reshaping the educational system.

This topic and the relevance of the work formed the following goals and objectives. The work aims to investigate the process of soft skills acquisition in the context of professional education and the future of such education. Research task: to investigate the essence of soft skills, to identify and analyze the main soft skills components, to study teaching methods which aim on the formation of the skill and summarize trends in the development of soft skills in the educational environment based on scientific literature.

METHOD

Study Design

The specified research determined the use of the following methods: analysis of existing scientific publications concerned with the topic of “soft skills” in the educational space and their connection with professional competencies. The comparative method is used in the analysis of soft skills formation in Ukrainian education and European practices. As well as the inductive method in the analysis of individual soft skills.

RESULTS

The Essence of “Soft Skills”

The modern world, with its scientific and technological development, globalization, and its own priorities, requires the transformation of education. Nowadays it is not enough to be a good specialist in a narrow profile and know only a specific field. A contemporary person begins to work more in society and with society, people have more responsibilities, and the effectiveness of the work does not always depend only on the specialized knowledge. There will always be customers, contractors, colleagues at work, teamwork to get the job done efficiently, and the modern world requires interdisciplinarity. One should add that there is also a great influence of the media world, a great flow of information, the problem of effective memorization, clip thinking, and hence the need for critical thinking and time management. Thus, the whole modern world with its opportunities does not require specific professional skills, but the only skills for all, for work and life. Out of this comes soft skills.

Today it is common to divide skills into two large categories: “hard skills” and “soft skills”. The first category are specific professional skills. Soft skills are called social skills, universal skills, or performance skills. Today, if recruiters choose candidates with the same profile for a job, the one with soft skills will have the advantage, because they think the job will be better and more efficient. People don't have a distance at work from society. All the same communication with colleagues, teamwork, the ability to adapt to new conditions, managing people, etc.

“Soft skills” is a sociological term referring to a person's emotional intelligence, a kind of list of personal characteristics somehow related to effective interaction with other people (Savchenko, 2021). One should note their severity of verification and manifestation. That is why recruiters pay so close attention to resumes and special meetings.

But if “soft skills” is an indicator of emotional intelligence, then there is a question about its “cultivation” and development. And starting with universities is not an option. “Soft skills” are the kind of skills that should be developed in a child from a young age. From kindergartens, and preparatory groups to universities and continuing education courses. Institutions must adapt to the rhythms of life and their demands. Therefore, the right policies are needed. The university must be modern and useful.

Speaking of politics, it is not only the politics of the university, not only the politics of individual countries but also the politics of the world. Indeed, a special role in the children education is played by the WHO and the UN. These two world organizations have taken life skills as the ability to adapt to the world around us.

According to the WHO, “life skills” are the capacity for adaptive and positive behaviors that enable a person to cope effectively with the demands and challenges of daily life (Kolyada, Kravchenko (2020). Such life skills are soft skills.

Soft Skills for Everyone

Previously, in the social consciousness, everyday thinking, and hard skills had an original meaning, and getting a narrow specialty was the most important and effective. Thus, soft skills were important for socioeconomic professions (from Latin society - society). A profession where a person collaborates with another. One can refer to such professions: psychologist, political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, teachers, etc. Such professionals are associated with ensuring social well-being in society, establishing communication links between individuals, transmitting socio-cultural experience, and shaping accepted norms, rules, and traditions (Kolyada, Kravchenko 2020).

The main skills include: teamwork (work in a group), creativity (the ability to present information in a new way, find ways to solve problems), leadership skills (the ability to motivate, combine interests, and resolve conflicts), communication (the ability to communicate, adjust to the interlocutor), tolerance), critical thinking (analyze information sources, search for information, build cause-effect relationships). (Kolyada & Kravchenko, 2020) adds emotional intelligence (as the ability to recognize others' emotions and manage one's own), oratory skills (the art of public speaking), traditionally means face-to-face communication with a live audience, but today includes any form of speech. Critical thinking: it is the ability to think logically about a problem to solve it (formally and informally) in front of an audience, including pre-recorded speech delivered at a great distance using technology (Olugbenga & Oluwatosin, 2022). And many other skills. Unfortunately, there is no clear, structured, and complete classification. Therefore, each researcher will formulate these criteria differently. For example, who will have the critical thinking, and who will have digital literacy.

Currently, analyzing the basic soft skills, one cannot say that they are suitable only for socioeconomic professions. One's existence is still connected with the existence of another person, in the flow of information and problem-solving. Therefore, it makes no sense today to draw a distinctive line between the skills.

Soft Skills and World Education

It is known that education depends on world processes and politics. And the future depends on education. Therefore, national governments and supranational structures are interested in training quality professionals. Such process requires analysis of the situation, forecasting, and planning with the possibility of re-planning. Because planning itself provides the opportunity to build priorities, allocate budgets, etc. Olugbenga & Oluwatosin (2022) believes that the culmination of the analysis of the “current state” of education and its future is reflected in the sustainable development goals of a similar document “Education – 2030”.

This paper addresses the future curriculum and soft skills of the 21st century; it is also to understand how the soft skills of the 21st century can be implemented in the curriculum and how soft skills are important to the future (Olugbenga & Oluwatosin, 2022).

Ukraine began its development in 2017 with a school reform - NUSH (New Ukrainian School). The New Ukrainian School is a key reform of the Ministry of Education and Science. The main goal is to create a school where it will be pleasant to study, and which will give students not only knowledge, as it is now, but also the ability to apply it in everyday life. (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022).

NUSH has completely changed the content and principles of Ukrainian education. Approaches and teaching methods have changed. The main goal is to interest the child so that it is pleasant to go to school and receive new knowledge. So that the pupil would not be afraid to go to school and get bad grades. The global goal of education reform in Ukraine is to raise an innovator and a citizen who is able to make responsible decisions and respects human rights (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022).

Scientists should not be carriers of certain information, but analyzers of it and make certain decisions based on that. The Ministry of Education believes that the ability to combine the acquired knowledge, the development of a way of thinking, the cultivation of specific values, and awareness of norms allows the child to socialize and become full citizens of society.

Kirdan, Kirdan (2021) in their study analyze the situation of soft skills training in higher education and conclude that the receipt of soft skills in the higher education environment depends on the policy of HEA.

The researchers identify three reasons for the success or failure of such a direction. The first is clearly articulated and prescribed measures and mechanisms for obtaining soft skills. The second - clearly defined arguments for the formation of soft skills, but the activities are sporadic. The third is the lack of clear actions and mechanisms for the procedure of formation of soft skills, and teachers lack the qualifications and experience to begin to form these skills.

Therefore, when the New Ukrainian School program was launched, teachers went for professional development and received pedagogical knowledge on the formation of soft skills.

Soft Skills in Practice

One recognizes that the way to soft skills formation, first of all, lies in the policy of the country and the Ministry of Education, which introduces programs and reforms the old systems to the needs of the present. After the chosen direction of growth and development, it is necessary to introduce certain ways, practices, and training methodologies. One collected the experience of Ukrainian and world colleagues and conducted an analysis. One considers different organizations as platforms for developing the inner qualities, academic virtue as a scientific practice for developing soft skills, classical methods of education, and STEAM education.

The university is not only lectures and seminars, not only acquiring certain knowledge, but also a strong academic community, and a cultural and social center. Students are the main subjects of interaction. For their cultural, physical, and emotional development, every university has Student Councils, Student Scientific Societies, Cultural Centers, etc. They are engaged in the protection of the rights and freedoms of students, their cultural and intellectual time. Indeed, in organizing any event, students build communication skills, teamwork, leadership skills, creativity, and responsibility. Kolyada & Kravchenko (2020) conducted a survey on the actualization of developing professional and personal qualities in university students, as it depends on the success and competitiveness in the labor market, the researchers interviewed students and employers. According to Tkachuk (Tkachuk, Sosnovenko, 2019) the soft skills increase students' interest and visit cognitive activities, promote the creation and work of youth. Special centers teach conflict resolution mediation, etc.

To a separate practice of soft skills development, one can refer to the observance of academic virtue in scientific activities. Since 1990, a rise in the observance of academic virtue is visible. Such research was conducted by (Vizniuk, 2021). According to the author's idea the problem of the introduction of academic virtue is actualized with the development of science and technology.

It should be noted that for the first time in 2017 in the Law of Ukraine "On Education" there is an article on the interpretation of the norms and rules of academic virtue. Thus, article 42 defines the term "academic virtue" as "a set of ethical principles and rules defined by law, which should guide the participants of the educational process during learning, teaching, and implementation of scientific (creative) activities to ensure the credibility of the results of learning and/or scientific (creative) achievements" (Vizniuk, 2021).

In following the academic virtue, the student is engaged in exercising his or her mental and moral faculties. When recruiting a paper, one must search for information and think critically about it, write well and express one's own opinions, not steal others' ideas, and use one's own time (time management) as well as communication skills.

Up to this point, it has been about non-academic learning. According to Succi and Wieandt (Succi, Wieandt, 2019), academic communities (universities) recognize formal skill development activities through academic ECTS credits.

"Soft skills development in the classroom can be accomplished through mini-study programs, programs, workshops, labs, study sessions, projects, company visits and study tours, and individual or group tasks" (Succi, Wieandt, 2019).

Teachers in Ukraine also stay on the path of classical teaching methods, such as essay writing, public speaking, and group work (preparing presentations). Without going beyond the classroom, students learn to work with each other, to use imagination, and creativity.

A special place should be given to teaching creativity. Piirto (2021) provides practice of meditation, walking, and silence to unlock creativity, imagination, creativity, and a sense of the world. It makes it clear that place and atmosphere are of great importance.

“Soft skills” have the prospect of good development also with the latest American system STEAM (S - science, T - technology, E - engineering, A - art and M - mathematics), which become a quality competitor to classical education, as it is an interdisciplinary system and is aimed at developing its own projects using certain knowledge that the student himself receives. Thus, he learns what he needs. STEAM education is precisely the system that adapts to the needs of our time and is the way out of the educational crisis.

Soft Skills Perspectives

Modern socio-political, technical, and economic conditions require humans to be flexible, capable of analysis, creative, and communicative. Together with globalization the world opens up, people open up to each other. But the labor market is also changing. Automation of routine work raises serious concerns about the impact of automation on the future of work (Alabdulkareem). There will be a reshaping of jobs and occupations. People with quality soft skills are coming to the forefront.

Such skills are difficult to assess immediately, but recruiters the most popular selection method related to the social and behavioral aspects of employee skill sets is the interview (Dipboye et al., 2012). In terms of soft skills assessment methods, the vast majority of hiring managers use interviews in various forms (Succi, Wieandt, 2019). One can include video interviews, video business cards, motivational writing, group interviews, etc. Similarly, a study by Succi and Wieandt (Succi, Wieandt, 2019) showed that employers are more interested in soft skills than students because they still do not see this advantage.

The prospect of developing soft skills lies in the labor market and the interest of employers with the goal of getting versatile people on their team. The prospect of automation and the popularity of the development of creative industries determine the development of soft skills among young people. In addition, one should not forget that education is not just a specialty. Education is a person's dignity and the future of a nation.

In Ukraine, the development of such skills follows the path of the New Ukrainian School. In the world it's the SREAM system, flipped classes, the portfolio method, etc., as well as all pay attention outside the classroom.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical study shows the interconnectedness of being of all society, education, and the individual in being and society. It is not enough for a contemporary person to read, write, and possess certain professional skills. Every person exists in society, communicates, has to work in a team or communicate with clients. The team atmosphere has a direct impact on the ability of workers to work, which is why the ability to resolve conflicts, to find compromises and support each other is so important. This leads to the fact that soft skills, which can really be called life skills are more necessary. Moreover, one think that, a critically minded person capable of learning can master a variety of knowledge, but soft skills simply cannot be mastered that way.

The whole educational system should be set up to raise a child to be a decent, modern citizen. From an early age, a child must learn to think, develop creativity, and learn to be in society. That is why this work aims to research the pedagogy of higher education.

The rapid global development cannot be stopped, but it is possible to educate people capable of living in this new world. Beginning with this study, one made an attempting to give a cardinal new meaning to soft skills for people. One underline its great importance for education. Particular confidence in the results came from a review of the literature aimed at the labor market, returnees, and HR. Concretely, one highlighted the future perspective of soft skills development.

Based on this research one can observe the labor market and study soft skills already in specific professions, explore the versatility of people, and the ability to adapt to different jobs and vacancies.

From the pedagogical point of view, this work pushes for the development and research of different teaching methods that will be more effective for school and university students.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In terms of the research based on the tasks set, one can draw the following conclusions:
The “Soft skills” are indicators of a person's emotional intelligence. The aim of the skills is adaptation in society. They are the opposite of hard skills, which are inherent in a particular specialty and narrow profile. For a long time, it was believed that soft skills are necessary for workers with social work, such as teachers, philosophers, and sociologists, for those who work with people.
But in recent decades, things have been changing. Technological breakthroughs, new economic and political conditions require people to be adaptable, communicative, creative, critical thinkers. The kind that has “Soft skills” listed.
2. The institution as schools, colleges, universities, and outside-the-classroom centers must develop such skills is education.
In Ukraine, the New Ukrainian School is concentrated on “Soft Skills” development. With a focus on growing into a decent person. In the world, it's a system of STEAM education, the flipped classroom, portfolios. But all systems leave the classical methods and teaching methods. For example, essay writing, group work, project presentation.
3. The prospect of “Soft skills” development lies in the automation of the labor market, robotization, the complexity of the world, and its connections. There is a demand for thinking people. Technology will evolve, and they will need to be mastered, implemented, and managed. Therefore, people with analytical and creative thinking are needed.
The education system must restructure and provide useful knowledge and skills so that university graduates can find jobs and be adaptable specialists in such a developed world.

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