

UCZENIE SIĘ W TRAKCIE ŻYCIA – ASPEKTY, POSTULATY, UZASADNIENIA

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The soft-skills development in preschool education future specialists

Abstract:

The article reflects and summarizes the experience of developing soft-skills in students of the second (master's) level of higher education in the process of teaching an integrated discipline „Organization of successful activities of a specialist in preschool education.” It is defined as its task of raising the level of awareness of future preschool education specialists with the essence of the concept, soft types skills, formation diagnosis; forms study, methods and means of forming soft skills in preschoolers. The indicators of the information-cognitive component of the formation of soft skills are determined.

The discipline curriculum „Organization of successful activities of a specialist in preschool education” reflects the topics of classes provided in each of the three content modules. The connection between the formation of soft-skills and the achievement of life and professional success is shown. Emphasis is placed on changing the concept of success (sensitivity and humanity dominate over rigidity and authoritarianism), which has a positive effect on education, contributes to the humanization of human relations.

The discipline provides for the development of the personality model of the preschool education specialist; implementation of goal-setting in accordance with certain requirements, in particular, in accordance with the SMART methodology; formation of the ability to communicate with representatives of various educational institutions, cooperate in a team, solve problems; organization of meetings with well-known specialists with soft skills due to their innovations.

The results of the pedagogical experiment are reflected. The expediency of conducting further scientific research in the direction of establishing the relationship between the level of development of the information-cognitive criterion of soft-skills and the general level of development of soft skills is shown.

Streszczenie:

Artykuł podsumowuje doświadczenia rozwijania umiejętności miękkich u studentów drugiego (magisterskiego) poziomu szkolnictwa wyższego w procesie nauczania w ramach „Organizacji udanych działań specjalisty w zakresie edukacji przedszkolnej”. Określa się ją jako zadanie podnoszenia poziomu świadomości przyszłych specjalistów wychowania przedszkolnego w zakresie: formy nauki, metod i środków kształtowania umiejętności miękkich.

Program nauczania „Organizacji skutecznych działań specjalisty wychowania przedszkolnego” odzwierciedla tematykę zajęć przewidzianych w każdym z trzech modułów przedmiotowych. Pokazano związek między kształtowaniem umiejętności miękkich a osiąganiem sukcesów życiowych i zawodowych. Nacisk kładziony jest na zmianę pojęcia sukcesu (wrażliwość i człowieczeństwo dominuje nad sztywnością i autorytaryzmem), co ma pozytywny wpływ na edukację, przyczynia się do humanizacji relacji międzyludzkich.

Analizy umożliwiają opracowanie modelu osobowości specjalisty ds. wychowania przedszkolnego; realizacja wyznaczania celów zgodnie z określonymi wymaganiami, w szczególności zgodnie z metodyką SMART; kształtowanie umiejętności komunikowania się z przedstawicielami różnych instytucji edukacyjnych, współpracy w zespole, rozwiązywania problemów; organizacja spotkań ze znanymi specjalistami. Odzwierciedlone są tu wyniki eksperymentu pedagogicznego. Pokazano celowość prowadzenia dalszych badań naukowych w kierunku ustalenia zależności między poziomem rozwoju informacyjno-poznawczego a ogólnym poziomem rozwoju umiejętności miękkich.

One of the leading trends in modern higher education institutions is the development of soft-skills for future specialists. They are also called the XXI century skills. Employers are paying more and more attention to the soft-skills of applicants for a vacant position in business, management, information technology. However, in the field of pedagogical professions there is a double interest as for the soft-skills, i.e., not only a specialist should possess them, but also should be formed in children. The foundations of personal qualities are laid in preschool children, and later are formed in primary school. The key competencies of the of preschool education Basic component continue to be reflected in the State Standard of Primary Education. Thus, the forms study, methods, means of soft-skills formation in future preschool ed-

education specialists should become a priority area within the research in pedagogical theory and practice.

The State standard analysis of preschool education of Ukraine proves the urgency of the soft-skills formation problem at children. For example, all the cross-cutting skills common to preschool and primary education are the 21st century skills, including creativity and initiative, emotion management, expression and reasoning, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving and team interaction¹. It should be noted that these skills are also reflected in European educational standards.

Thus, a specialist in preschool education must not only obtain soft-skills, but also have the ability to form them in preschoolers. Such training takes place during the study of all disciplines in pedagogical universities. But, the results of the master's students survey (1 year of study) show that 67% could not give a complete and comprehensive answer to the question: „What is soft-skills”; they are not sufficiently familiar with the definitions of „hard skills” and „soft skills, or either they do not know what it is, or they give unspecific answers, they make mistakes. However, the ignorance of the definition does not mean a low level of soft-skills. Observations of students during classes, pedagogical practice, their activity in student government bodies allow us to conclude that the predominance of soft-skills sufficient and high level. But it is reasonable to assume that raising the awareness level of the XXI century skills, will allow them to improve and prepare themselves for the provision of better educational services in preschool education.

Due to the relevance, the soft-skills development is the subject of numerous studies by scientists (N. Aznam (2021), D. Cretu (2017), R. Crosbie (2005), I. Irwanto (2021), M. Hashimah (2015), H. Nor (2015), K. Tang (2015), etc.). The interest is the conclusion of K. Tang, H. Nor, M. Hashimah, that soft skills complement hard skills and have a significant impact on teachers' ability to do their job and their employment have a significant impact on the ability of teachers to do their job and on their employability (Soft skills complement hard skills and have a significant impact on the ability of teachers to do their

¹ Basic component of preschool education (State standard of preschool education). Approved by the order of the Ministry of Education and Science no. 33 from 12.01.2021.

job and on their employability)². Our study is interested in the results of scientific research by Konieczna-Kucharska Marta, who identified the hard and soft competencies that a teacher should possess and proved the greater importance of soft skills³.

Thus, the studies by Susilawati, Nurfina Aznam, Paidi, Irwanto Irwanto, who conducted a comprehensive analysis of soft skills and studied the following skills as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, and social interaction are worth discovering. Proving the relevance of soft skills, they are based on the results of research by Crosbie R. research on the importance of soft and hard skills for success: “collaborative study conducted at Harvard University and Stanford Research Institute found that, for the determinants of a person’s success at work, 15% are influenced by their technical knowledge and skills, while the remaining 85% are influenced by their soft skills”⁴. In our opinion, such an assumption cannot be unequivocally accepted and should be discussed. The ratio of hard and soft skills depends on the type of the human activity.

Researchers also identify training courses that are the most effective way to develop soft skills. According to Daniel Maria Cretu, such a course in the program of training future preschool teachers and primary education is Theory and Methodology of Instruction⁵.

Volodymyr Hnatyuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University (Ternopil, Ukraine) has a long-standing practice of mastering the discipline „An organization of successful activity” by future teachers⁶.

² Tang, K. N., Nor, H. H., Hashimah, M. Y., *Novice teacher perceptions of the soft skills needed in today’s workplace*, “Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences” 2015, 177, p. 284.

³ Konieczna-Kucharska, M., Miękkie i twarde kompetencje nauczycieli. *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Częstochowskiej. Zarządzanie*. Nr 19/2015, p. 233-234, <http://www.zim.pcz.czest.pl/znwz/files/Mi-kkie-i-twarde-kompetencje-nauczycieli.pdf>.

⁴ Susilawati, Aznam, N., Paidi, & Irwanto, I. (2021). Socio-scientific issues as a vehicle to promote soft skills and environmental awareness. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 10(1)/2021, p. 164.

⁵ Cretu, D. M., *Fostering 21st Century Skills For Future Teachers*. The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences. Conference: Edu World 7th International Conference 2017. p. 672.

⁶ Yankovych, O., *Organization of Successful Activities as an educational technology*

Based on the scientific research analysis and our own research, we concluded that it is appropriate to teach an integrated course „The successful activities organization of a specialist in preschool education” (second master’s level of higher education, 1 year).

The purpose of the article: to reflect and generalize the experience of soft-skills development in students of the second (master’s) level of higher education in the process of teaching an integrated discipline „Organization of the specialist’s successful activities in preschool education”.

Our goal is to raise the awareness of future preschool professionals about soft skills and their diagnosis.

Research methods

The quantitative and qualitative methods were used to achieve the goal of the paper. There was conducted an analysis of legislative, normative documents of preschool and higher education in the specialty 012 Preschool education; European Qualifications Framework; scientific sources on the formation of soft-skills in students; analysis of student activity products (projects and written works on the topics of diagnostics of soft-skills formation).

Pedagogical experiment to determine the development level of information indicators and cognitive criteria for the formation of soft skills (definition awareness of the soft-skills, their structure, diagnostic techniques).

The pedagogical experiment was conducted at Volodymyr Hnatyuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University and Yuri Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University during 2018-2020 within the project “Teaching Excellence”. 176 students (4 control and 4 experimental groups) took part in the experiment. Among the qualitative (empirical) leading methods there were observations

of higher pedagogical educational institutions of Ukraine. IJPINT: International Journal of Pedagogy, Innovation and New Technologies. Vol. 1. № 1/2014, p. 21–31; Yankovych, O., Bednaryk, Yu., Andrzheyevska, A., Educational technologies of modern educational institutions: a textbook for teachers, educators and students of the ped. Instit. education. Ternopil: RVV TNPU named after V. Hnatyuk, Ternopil 2015, p. 130, http://dspace.tnpu.edu.ua/bitstream/123456789/9075/1/JAnkovich_Osvit_tex.pdf

and conversations. The leading quantitative methods were tests performed in the Moodle system. Students were asked to answer a number of questions:

1. Do you know what soft-skills are?

- a. yes; b) no; c) I cannot say for sure.

2. What is soft-skills? 2

- a. specialized professional skills or soft skills;
- b. specialized professional or solid skills;
- c. a set of non-specialized, super-professional skills that are responsible for successful participation in the work process;
- d. skills that allow to develop intercultural communication;
- e. I do not know.

3. Which of the following skills would you call soft-skills? Students had the opportunity to choose one or more answers. 2

- a. narrow professional competencies, for example, the ability to diagnose preschoolers' readiness to study at school;
- b. ability to solve problems and prevent conflicts in the field of cooperation with foreign partners, in particular employees of foreign educational institutions (preschool education institutions) of foreign countries;
- c. super-professional, non-specialized skills that allow to successfully create activities;
- d. methodological competencies in the field of preschool education;
- e. I do not know.

4. What is social intelligence? 1

- a. the coefficient of the individual intellectual development, which is developed in the process of interaction with people in society;
- b. a set of abilities that determines the success of social interaction;
- c. the ability to understand the behavior of another person, their own behavior;

- d. the intellectual potential of the individual, which is developed in the institution of preschool education during social interaction.
- e. I do not know. 1

5. What qualities are inherent in a person with the developed soft-skills? 1

- a. creativity; critical thinking; effective communication, ability to work in a team; respect for people; leadership qualities as to set goals, plan, strive for self-development; stress resistance, etc.;
- b. creativity; critical thinking; leadership qualities: charisma, ability to act on their own to beat a competitor; stress resistance;
- c. creativity; critical thinking; charisma, adventurism, ability to take risks; the ability to use any methods to win the competition.
- d. I do not know. 1

6. Do you know the methods of diagnosing the soft-skills level? 2

- a. a) yes; b) no; c) partially.
- b. If you chose option a, or c) write what exactly.

7. What is your level of soft-skills? 2

- a. high;
- b. sufficient;
- c. low;
- d. I do not know.

1.1. Diagnosis of soft skills formation

During the study of soft-skills, it is advisable to compare the native language with air, which was made by the famous Ukrainian teacher K. D. Ushinsky: “Human inhaled air for a long time before learning about its existence, and for a long time knew about the existence of air before discovering its properties, its composition and its significance in the life of the body. People have long enjoyed the treasures of the native language, before paying attention to

the complexity and depth of their body and appreciating the importance in their spiritual life”⁷.

But by studying the composition and genesis, we can enrich the language and as for the air, they are able to improve its quality, for example, by saturating with oxygen, reducing pollution, and etc.

Such comparisons are also relevant for soft-skills. Critical thinking, creativity, ability to cooperate in a staff or a team, etc. have been formed in the educational institutions for decades. But only relatively recently have all these skills been combined into soft-skills and supplemented with modern skills i. e. stress management, time management, emotional intelligence, analytical thinking and etc. However, with soft skills, a person often does not know how they are interpreted, never diagnosed the level of their formation. And, therefore, sees no prospects for raising the level.

Thus, we have defined the task of scientific research to raise the awareness level of future preschool education specialists at the university with soft skills, which meets the information-cognitive criterion of soft-skills formation. This should give stimulus to further self-development. In addition, our tasks met the requirements of the second (master’s) level Standard of higher education in the specialty 012 Preschool education. In particular, among the general competencies there are those that are soft skills i. e. the ability to act socially responsible and consciously; ability to generate new ideas (creativity); ability to abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis; ability to work in a team; ability to identify, state and solve problems⁸. Since in the professional activity of a preschool education specialist hard skills are supplemented by soft ones, among the competencies are those that are identified as soft skills, in particular is the ability to self-education, self-improvement, self-realization in professional activities and competitiveness in the labor market⁹.

⁷ Ushynskiy, K. D., Native word. Selected pedagogical works., Rad. school, Kyiv 1983. V. 1. P. 121.

⁸ The standard of the higher education. Second master’s level. 012 Preschool education, p. 7, <https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/vyshcha/standarty/2020/05/2020-zatverd-standart-012-m.pdf>

⁹ Ibidem

After analyzing the standards of the second (master's) level of higher education in the specialty 012 Preschool education, conducting dialogues with students, we determined the indicators of the information-cognitive component of the soft skills development. Except the information-cognitive component in research, motivational-target, procedural-diagnostic and result-analytical components were distinguished. Indicators of the information-cognitive component are the following: 1. Knowledge of the concept and literal translation essence of the term soft-skills; differentiation of hard and soft skills. 2. Knowledge of the list of skills and abilities, connected to the soft-skills term. 3. Awareness of the essence (content) in skills and abilities, which are united by the soft-skills term. 4. Knowledge of methods for diagnosing the level of soft-skills. 5. Knowledge of the level of soft-skills formation.

According to the test results, students could get 2 points for answering questions 2, 3, 6, 7; for 4 and 5 – one point each.

According to the methodology developed by us, high-level representatives should receive 9-10 points according to the test results; average – 6-8 points; low – 0-5 points.

Representatives of a high level of soft-skills awareness correctly define the definition, distinguish between hard and soft skills; call the skills and abilities that are combined by the soft-skills term; correctly interpret and understand them, know the methods of diagnosing the level of soft-skills formation; know their own level of soft-skills.

We offered the students to take the following test and obtained such results: out of 176 students, 4 (2.3%) were at a high level; on average – 61 students (34.6%); at low – 111 (63.1%).

1.2. “Organization of successful activity for a preschool education specialist” as an academic discipline

The training course we offer consists of three content modules: “Theoretical aspects of achieving success and organizing successful activities”, “Technology of organizing successful activities” and “Methods of forming soft skills in a preschool education specialist” with separate topics of classes

“Development in preschoolers’ skills of the XXI century” in accordance with the Basic component of preschool education.

The structure of the discipline “The successful activities organization of a kindergarten specialist” is presented in table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the discipline “The successful activities organization of a preschool specialist”

No.	Title of content modules and topics	Number of hours		
		Lect.	Pract.	Ind. work
Content module 1. Theoretical aspects of achieving success and organizing successful activities				
Topic 1.	Organization of successful activities, basic concepts and historical aspects. Success and soft-skills.	1	0	2
Topic 2.	The main factors of success and the soft-skills development	1	0	2
Topic 3.	The model of a successful personality of a specialist preschool institution	2	2	5
	Total on the content module	4	2	9
Content module 2. Technology of the successful activity organization				
Topic 4.	Diagnosis of success. Increase the success rate	2	2	4
Topic 5.	The art of goal setting. Requirements for defining life and professional goals	2	2	3
Topic 6.	The main stages of successful activity. Organization of successful activity for a preschool institution specialist	2	4	4
	Total on the content module	6	8	11
Content module 3. Methods of forming soft skills in a preschool education specialist				
Topic 9.	Diagnosis of soft-skills development	2	4	4
Topic 10.	Communication. Basic rules and methods of communication. Conflicts and their prevention	2	4	2
Topic 11.	Organization of effective cooperation in the team. Emotional intelligence	2	4	2
Topic 12.	Formation of skills of preschoolers of the XXI century	2	4	4
Topic 13.	Innovations of educators in the context of soft skills development	0	2	4
Topic 14.	Self-development of a specialist in preschool education.	2	2	4
	Total on the content module 10/20/20	10	20	20
	Total	20	30	40

In the first lesson, students will learn what success is, hard and soft skills. They discuss how hard and soft skills are related when it comes to the professional activities of an educator. Our conclusion is as follows it is impossible to establish the exact quantitative ratio of soft-skills and hard-skills that ensure success, just as it is impossible to determine what more depends on the area of the rectangle, length or width.

The model of a successful personality reflects a new approach to the relationship between the importance of hard and soft skills as they are equally important.

Emphasis was placed on the fact that the image of a successful person has changed. He is a sensitive person, not cruel and authoritarian. This conclusion has a biological basis¹⁰. Changing the concept of success has a positive effect on education and contributes to the humanization of human relations.

The task of this lesson was to get acquainted with the experience of famous specialists in preschool education, to learn the essence of their innovations, to determine the role of human virtues i. e. sensitivity, responsibility, diligence, honesty in achieving success in professional activities. The lesson was conducted with the participation of a specialist in preschool education, i.e., a practice that is the author of innovations, such as the introduction of media education, the use of the Suzuki method, etc.¹¹ The use of such forms and methods of work allowed to form the competencies specified in the Standard of Higher Education that is the ability to organize cooperation of preschool education institutions with various social institutions, categories of professionals, to partner with parents¹².

¹⁰ Cook, K. (2020). *Everyone wins. How to succeed by helping others*. M.: Publishing house MIF.

¹¹ Kuzma, I. I., *Praxeological tales*. Vector. Ternopil 2019, 16 p; Kuzma, I. I., *Media education in preschool and primary education institutions: methodical recommendations*.: Vector. Ternopil 2020, p. 126; Yankovych, O. I., *Suzuki Method in the training prospective specialists in preschool education*. *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. 10(12)/2020, p. 162-167. <https://apcz.umk.pl/czasopisma/index.php/JEHS/article/view/JEHS.2020.10.12.015>

¹² The standard of the higher education. Second master's level. 012 Preschool education. p. 7. <https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/vyshcha/standarty/2020/05/2020-zatverd-standart-012-m.pdf>

An important place in the study of the course is given to diagnosis and goal-setting. There are two classes for diagnosing such as diagnosing success and diagnosing the development of soft skills. Of course, they are interconnected. However, they are not identical. Diagnosis of success involves determining the level of motivation to succeed, which is outweighed by the hope of success or failure fear; ability to succeed. During the diagnosis of success, students get acquainted with the diagnostic methods of children's readiness for school. Diagnostic activities are not mandatory for educators of Ukrainian preschool institutions. However, in other European countries, such as the Republic of Poland, it is mandatory. The level of readiness of the child for school is one of the indicators of the educator success.

The level of critical thinking, creativity, etc. was measured during the soft skills diagnosis session.

Students set goals according to the requirements for it, in particular according to the SMART method.

While studying the topic "Communication. Basic rules and methods of communication" "strategies of communication with preschoolers, families of preschoolers and their families, colleagues, administration of the institution were studied; differences between pedagogical and non-pedagogical communication. Students learned about the types of conflicts and ways to prevent them. Diagnosed to choose the strategy of conflict resolution they are prone to in a conflict situation (test "Determining the behavior style in a conflict situation" (according to the method of K. Thomas – R. Kilman).

While studying the topic "Organization of effective cooperation within the team", students not only used a variety of interactive methods of teaching and team building, but also used national and foreign innovations, such as entertainment pedagogy, which promotes the integration of participants. An important issue is the development of emotional intelligence of future professionals. Analyzing fragments of films about contradictory actions of children and adults, students learn to understand the behavior of adults and children on the basis of cause-and-effect relationships, motivation for such actions, while seeing, figuratively speaking, not only the tip of the iceberg but also underwater part. It was cooperation that helped man survive in the process of evolution, it was a more important factor than competition. An innovation in the

study of the topic “Development of skills in preschoolers of the XXI century” was the use of praxeological fairy tales as an innovative media product¹³.

The course ends with the definition of ways of self-development of a specialist in preschool education. It provides acquaintance with the European practice of preschool education, preschool education systems of foreign countries, increasing the level of success rate and the formation of soft-skills in accordance with the defined objectives in accordance with the SMART methodology.

1.3. The experimental work results

After studying the course “Organization of successful activities of a preschool education specialist”, we conducted a diagnosis of the level of students’ awareness with soft skills. In addition to testing in the first phase of the experiment, graduate students wrote written descriptions of diagnostic techniques used to measure the level of soft skills. The number of high and middle level representatives has significantly increased; decreased the number of students who were at a low level, as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Dynamics of levels of self-confidence senior preschoolers

Levels	Control group (82 people)		Experimental group (94 people)	
	Before the experiment	After the experiment	Before the experiment	After the experiment
High	2 (2,4 %)	12 (14,6 %)	2 (2,1%)	31 (33 %)
Sufficient	29 (35,4 %)	41 (50,0 %)	32 (34,1%)	52 (55,3 %)
Low	51 (62,2 %)	29 (35,4 %)	60 (63,8%)	11 (11,7 %)

According to the analysis of the research results, the control groups also showed a positive trend in the formation of awareness of soft skills, although less noticeable than in the experimental groups i.e. the number of high-level students increased by 12.4%; low-level respondents decreased by 26.8%. The

¹³ Kuzma, I. I., Praxeological tales. Vector, Ternopil 2019, p. 16.

positive dynamics in the control groups is explained by the training of students in the master's program, which involves the formation of general competencies of students, as well as increased interest in the research problem after the first test.

Discussion

According to the results of the experiment, we found that as a result of studying the course "Organization of successful activities of preschool education specialists" in experimental groups sharply increased (by 30.9%) the number of students with a high level of information and cognitive component of soft-skills; at the same time, the number of low-level representatives decreased sharply almost six times (by 52.1%).

We assume that raising awareness of soft skills will help increase the overall level of soft-skills in future preschool education professionals (indicators of motivational-target, procedural-diagnostic and result-analytical components), which should be the subject of future research: correlations between indicators of information-cognitive and procedural components.

Conclusions

Hard and soft skills complement each other in the work of a preschool education specialist. However, two thirds of students entering the master's program cannot correctly and comprehensively define the essence of the concepts of soft-skills and hard skills. At the same time, soft skills are listed among the general competencies in the Standard of higher education of the second (master's) level in the specialty 012 - Preschool education. Knowledge of the content of these concepts, diagnostics of their formation allow teachers to more productively carry out self-development, as well as to promote the formation of these skills in preschoolers using the methods of pedagogical diagnosis. Many years of experience in studying the discipline "Organization of successful activities of preschool education specialists", the results

of the experiment conducted at Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University (Ternopil, Ukraine), Yuri Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University (Chernivtsi, Ukraine) testify to its effectiveness in forming students soft-skills, as well as individual hard skills. At the same time, the number of students with a high level of awareness of the skills of the XXI century increases (in our experiment by 30.9%), decreases (by 52.1%) the number of representatives of low level of the soft-skills awareness.

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