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## SOFT SKILLS AS A COMPONENT OF FUTURE IT-SPECIALISTS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

*The article explores soft skills as a key component of the professional competence of future online specialists. The issue of professional training for future specialists in the field of information technology is of particular importance within the system of higher education due to the demand of current trends in the society.*

*The aim of the study is to identify and analyze the role of foreign language learning in developing soft skills as an integral component of IT students' professional competence. Soft skills are defined as a set of personal and communicative abilities that ensure effective teamwork, adaptability to change, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving.*

*The article points out the possibility of foreign language means of teaching (English) to develop soft skills among students majoring in Information Technology. A range of academic sources addressing the formation of soft skills in future IT professionals is analyzed to identify effective approaches for integrating these skills into professional training. The analysis confirms that the development of soft skills should be integrated into the broader framework of professional education within foreign language lessons serving as a powerful tool in this process. Due to the specific features of language learning—such as communicative tasks, work with authentic materials, role-plays, case-study, and discussions—favorable conditions are created for enhancing interpersonal communication, teamwork, intercultural competence, and critical thinking. The study highlights the perceptual differences between students' native language and English, which stem from cultural specificities.*

*Particular attention is paid to the significance of language learning in developing critical thinking, creativity, team collaboration, adaptability, and the ability to articulate and defend one's viewpoint. A direct correlation is substantiated between students' level of language competence and the development of their soft skills. The analysis confirms the effectiveness of defined interactive teaching methods—particularly discussions, case studies, role-playing, and working with authentic materials—in the context of soft skills formation during the professional training of future IT specialists.*

**Key words:** foreign language, future professionals, professional competence, soft skills.

**Introduction.** In the modern context of rapid development in information technology, it is increasingly recognized that the professional competence of future IT specialists includes not only technical (hard) skills but also soft skills, which serve as a key component of their professional success. Soft skills represent a set of personal and communicative abilities that ensure effective teamwork, adaptability to change, and the capacity for critical thinking and creative problem-solving.

Thus, it is now widely acknowledged that soft skills constitute an essential component of the professional competence of future IT specialists, significantly impacting their ability to operate effectively in a dynamic, international environment. Furthermore, linguistic competence serves to reinforce these skills, helping to reduce communication barriers and enhance intercultural interaction. These skills include the ability for critical thinking, teamwork, adaptability to changes in the professional environment, as well as resilience—i.e., the capacity to function effectively under stress or uncertainty [1]. 77% employers increasingly view soft skills as equally valuable as

technical expertise. Among the most in-demand are communication, organization, planning, creativity, and teamwork [2]. The analytical report by the Oxford University Careers Service notes that in the coming years, employer demand for competencies such as emotional intelligence and effective communication skills will continue to grow [3]. Thus, there is a noticeable shift in emphasis from purely technical competencies (hard skills) to personal and communicative characteristics (soft skills).

The development of such skills as effective communication, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to work in a team has gained particular significance in the context of digital transformation, globalization of the labor market, the spread of remote employment, and the diminishing necessity of physical presence in the office. These changes have, in turn, led to a significant reduction in face-to-face interpersonal communication.

The widespread use of text-based communication forms—particularly messengers and chats—in both professional and personal interactions, as well as the impact of wartime events in Ukraine on society

in general and on future specialists in particular, in our view, reduce young people's need for direct interpersonal interaction. This trend may contribute to the development of anxiety toward live verbal communication and the reinforcement of language barriers—both in their native and foreign languages.

In this context, there is a growing interest in researching the identified issue, which is related to the development of soft skills (specifically, the communicative component) in future professionals who will work across various fields of professional activity.

#### **Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.**

As noted by Ukrainian scholar I. Savchenko, soft skills are an essential component of a modern specialist's professional competence in the context of labor market transformation [4]. A range of studies focused on the forms and methods of developing future specialists' soft skills. O. Semenog and O. Kulbabska emphasize that soft skills are developed not only through traditional learning but also through student participation in interregional educational initiatives, [5]. Moreover, training tasks and case studies have been identified as the most effective methods in this context [6].

Ukrainian scholars V. Mytsenko and T. Rusanovska highlighted the potential to adapt these principles to foreign language instruction, which would promote the development of interpersonal and communication skills among university students. They placed particular emphasis on the practical implementation of these principles in the learning process, suggesting that they can be directly incorporated into foreign language teaching methodologies [7].

The demand for computer science graduates in the labor market is increasing. University programs require thorough revision and the introduction of qualitatively new teaching methods that should replace traditional approaches. [8].

According to conducted studies, IT specialists demonstrate a high level of development in cognitive skills such as analytical thinking, problem-solving, and self-organization. At the same time, interpersonal soft skills (communication, emotional sensitivity, leadership) may be less developed and require targeted formation—especially in the context of a globalized market [9].

**The aim of the article** is to identify and analyze the role of foreign language learning in developing soft skills as an integral component of IT students' professional competence.

**Main content.** Language is not only a system of signs for conveying information but also an important factor in representing one's identity and a means of formulating, expressing, and defending one's personal position. Effective language proficiency implies the ability to use the full range of communicative tools—both verbal (words, lexical structures) and non-verbal (gestures, facial expressions, intonation)—

which significantly influence the nature of interpersonal interaction.

In a professional environment, these elements can either provoke conflicts or, conversely, facilitate constructive dialogue, ensuring mutual understanding and effective teamwork. This is especially crucial when working on various types of projects to achieve the desired results.

Analyzing the role of the discipline of English Language for Specific Purposes as a tool for developing soft skills among university students, O. Kravets expresses her view on the appropriateness of using interactive, communicative, and situational teaching methods during the instruction of business English, particularly based on the *Market Leader* textbook (Longman/Pearson). [10].

A Ukrainian researcher N. Havryliuk, highlights the necessity of interactive learning activities, authentic materials, and feedback for the development of interpersonal and team competencies [11].

In the context of using artificial intelligence as a tool for developing soft skills during foreign language teaching, other Ukrainian scientists note that the level of English proficiency directly impacts the ability to demonstrate soft skills in intercultural and professional communication environments [12].

So, according to the authors' observations, there is an interdependence between language competence and the manifestation of soft skills. Even with well-developed soft skills, insufficient language proficiency can lead to communication barriers, misunderstandings, and errors in intercultural interaction. Consequently, a low level of hard skills (foreign language vocabulary, grammar) combined with a lack of adequate soft skills limits the ability to conduct effective business communication [13].

So/ interactive methods of teaching foreign languages are identified as the most effective in the context of developing students' soft skills. At the same time, H. Korniyush states that soft skills can be developed not only through communicative exercises (speaking practice) but also during reading and writing activities [14].

Thus, the development of IT students' soft skills within the framework of the course «Foreign Language» or «English for Specific Purposes» should, in our opinion, be considered through three complementary directions, based on the potential that teaching/learning a foreign language in the university environment offers:

First, it is important to identify which specific soft skills can and should be developed in the context of learning a foreign language (English). Based on the conducted analysis and practical experience of teaching English to future IT specialists at a higher education institution, we believe the following skills should be emphasized: communicative competence, critical thinking, teamwork, adaptability, and intercul-

tural awareness. These skills contribute to successful communication of IT students in their future professional activities and are crucial for their integration into the global professional community.

Second, an important aspect is the selection of methods and forms of teaching/learning that promote the effective development of the mentioned skills. Among them, it is advisable to highlight: project-based activities, role-playing games, case methods, group work, discussions, debates, as well as the use of digital platforms for collaborative task completion. Such approaches not only make language practice more dynamic but also create conditions that closely resemble real professional situations.

Third, special attention should be paid to the selection of learning materials that not only correspond to the students' language level but are also relevant to their future professional activities. These may include authentic texts, video and audio materials, thematic cases, as well as tasks simulating situations of professional communication in the online environment. Such materials ensure contextualization of the learning process, stimulate students' cognitive interest, and contribute to the integration of language and soft skills as key components of their professional competence.

It should be noted that determining three main directions – defining skills, choosing methods and forms of teaching/learning, and selecting teaching materials – is methodologically appropriate for their analysis to identify the best ones. During practice, the process of teaching and learning a foreign language requires their simultaneous combination and mutual integration.

While suggesting students various role-playing tasks it is vital to draw future IT specialists' attention to the differences in perception between their native language and English, which arise from cultural specificities. In particular, it is necessary to caution these professionals against the literal translation of phrases from their native language (calquing), as such expressions may be interpreted by native English speakers as excessively direct, brusque, or even impolite. The English language, especially in business contexts, typically employs softer and politer formulations that reflect social distance, politeness conventions, and the interlocutor's cultural expectations. For instance, the phrase "*I want this report tomorrow*" is perceived as a command in English-speaking environments, which contradicts the norms of courteous communication and should be replaced by "*Could you please send me the report by tomorrow?*" or "*It would be appreciated if you could share the report by tomorrow.*"

It is particularly important to explain the fact to future specialists that written communication lacks non-verbal cues—such as intonation, facial expressions, or gestures—that in oral communication typically serve to soften statements or add emotional nuance. Under these conditions, literally translated, straightforward sentences from the native language

may be perceived by interlocutors as overly demanding or even inappropriate. This, in turn, can negatively affect the effectiveness of professional interaction, reduce the level of trust during the conversation, and create additional communication barriers. In the context of the IT area, such misunderstandings can have serious consequences, including the loss of an international client or the failure of a project.

In the educational process, it is advisable to apply methods and forms of teaching that encourage students' interpersonal interaction, which contributes to the development of their hard and soft skills to express opinions clearly and demonstrate adaptability. In this case the group work is the most productive, to our mind, as it allows students to collaborate, share ideas and discuss different subjects. In other words, the teacher should encourage students' teamwork, support their aspiration to communicate.

To receive the higher level of the students' soft skills development the educational content should be practice-oriented and authentic. Beyond the acquisition of hard language skills—such as grammar and vocabulary—a crucial element of the educational process is the introduction of current trends promoted by leading internet companies and services. Particular emphasis should be placed on English lexical borrowings actively employed in the IT sector (e.g., *framework*, *task*, *deploy*), ensuring their correct usage in accordance with the norms of academic and professional discourse.

**Conclusions.** Due to the rapid advancement of digital technologies, there is a discernible shift in a focus from professionals' hard skills towards their soft skills, which are critically important for effective teamwork, adaptability to change, and sustainable professional development and career growth of future IT specialists. This shift, in turn, impacts the overall efficiency and performance of companies and organizations.

Foreign language proficiency serves not only as a way to access professional information but, through a broad spectrum of instructional tools—including methodologies, forms, and materials—can function as a significant factor in cultivating soft skills among prospective online technology professionals. There is a strong link between future professionals' linguistic competence and the manifestation of their soft skills. It should be noted, that even performing well-developed soft skills, inadequate language proficiency may give rise to communication barriers and misunderstandings in intercultural interactions at the workplace. So, it is advisable to apply methods and forms of teaching/learning that encourage students' interpersonal interaction, which contributes to the development of their soft skills and hard skills.

The further research lies in the development of a specialized instructional module aimed at enhancing IT students' soft skills through foreign language

teaching/learning. It is expected to improve critical thinking, teamwork, intercultural communication, presentation, and analytical skills, all of which are indispensable for effective professional engagement within an international context.

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#### Васильченко О. І. М'які навички як компонент професійної компетентності майбутніх фахівців у галузі інформаційних технологій

Стаття присвячена дослідженняю м'яких навичок як компонента професійної компетентності майбутніх онлайн фахівців. Питання професійної підготовки майбутніх фахівців у галузі інформаційних технологій має особливе значення в системі вищої освіти. М'які навички фахівця визначено, як комплекс особистісно-комунікативних умінь, що забезпечують ефективну взаємодію у команді, адаптивність до змін, здатність критично мислити і творчо вирішувати проблеми. У статті наголошено на важливості іноземної мови (англійської) у процесі формування м'яких навичок (soft skills) у студентів, які здобувають освіту за спеціальністю «Інформаційні технології».

Метою статті є аналіз ролі англійської мови у розвитку м'яких навичок як компонента професійної компетентності IT-студентів. Особливу увагу приділено значенню іноземної мови у професійній підготовці як засобу формування таких навичок як критичне мислення, креативність, здатність до ефективної взаємодії в команді, адаптивність, уміння формулювати та відстоювати власну точку зору. Проаналізовано наукові джерела, які присвячені проблематиці формування м'яких навичок у майбутніх IT-фахівців з метою визначення шляхів їх формування у процесі професійної підготовки майбутніх спеціалістів.

Аналіз сучасних наукових джерел доводить, що формування м'яких навичок має відбуватися інтегровано із професійною підготовкою, а іноземна (англійська) мова є потужним засобом цього процесу. Завдяки специфіці навчання мови – комунікативним вправам, роботі з аутентичними матеріалами, рольовим іграм, кейс-методу, дискусіям – створюються сприятливі умови для розвитку таких м'яких навичок, як міжособистісна комунікація, командна взаємодія, міжкультурна

компетентність, критичне мислення. Підкреслено різне сприйняття фраз співбесідниками завдяки культурним та мовним особливостям. Зроблено наголос на наявність прямої залежності між рівнем мовної компетентності студентів та сформованістю їхніх м'яких навичок. Здійснений аналіз засвідчує ефективність інтерактивних методів навчання – зокрема дискусій, кейс-методу, рольових ігор, роботи з автентичними матеріалами – у контексті розвитку м'яких навичок в освітньому процесі підготовки майбутніх IT-фахівців.

**Ключові слова:** іноземна мова, майбутні фахівці, професійна компетентність, м'які навички.

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