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SOFT SKILL FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES AT NON LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This article discusses the topic of formation and development of soft, or interpersonal, skills among students in a foreign language class at non-linguistic university. In the modern world, it is impossible to feel confident in a profession if a person does not have any Soft Skills. It is they that allow a specialist in any field to be able to interact with their employers, colleagues, partners, subordinates, clients. Soft skills are valued no less, and often more than hard, professional ones. The success of any activity depends on this. Regardless of the classification, the main ones are: effective communication, ability to solve problems, time management, customer focus, emotional intelligence, creativity, self-control, conflict resolution, taking responsibility, empathy. These skills can be formed at university in a foreign language class. The examples of tasks given successfully solve the problem of forming not only the basic competencies in the discipline of a foreign language, but also the necessary soft skills. Group work is noted as a way for students to interact with each other. As a result, those graduates who are with soft skills are preferred in the modern labor market.

Keywords: soft skills, interaction with people, professional activity, development of Soft Skills, problem solving.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ И РАЗВИТИЕ ГИБКИХ НАВЫКОВ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В НЕЯЗЫКОВОМ ВУЗЕ

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Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается тема формирования и развития гибких, или межличностных, навыков у студентов на занятиях по иностранному языку в неязыковом вузе. В современном мире невозможно уверенно чувствовать себя в профессии, если человек не обладает гибкими навыками, так называемыми Soft Skills. Именно они позволяют специалисту в любой области независимо от направления уметь взаимодействовать со своими работодателями, коллегами, партнерами, подчиненными, клиентами. Гибкие навыки ценятся не менее, а зачастую более, чем жесткие, или непосредственно профессиональные. От них напрямую зависит успех любой деятельности. Независимо от классификации, основными являются: эффективная коммуникация, способность решать задачи, управление временем, клиентоориентированность, эмоциональный интеллект, креативность, самоконтроль, способность выходить из конфликтных ситуаций, умение брать на себя ответственность, эмпатия. Эти навыки возможно формировать в вузе на занятиях по иностранному языку. Рассматриваются примеры заданий, которые успешно решают задачу формирования не только основных компетенций по дисциплине иностранный язык, но и необходимых гибких навыков. Отмечается работа в группе как способ взаимодействия студентов друг с другом, в результате чего формируются Soft Skills. В результате, по окончании вуза, выпускникам, обладающим и владеющим гибкими навыками, на современном рынке труда отдается предпочтение.

Ключевые слова: гибкие навыки, взаимодействие с людьми, профессиональная деятельность, формирование, развитие Soft Skills, решение задач.

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The world in which we live today is commonly referred to as the VUCA world, based on the abbreviation of its characteristics: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. This reality cannot help impacting all areas of our life with no exceptions, including such an important aspect for each person as career choice, and, moreover, the exact direction of the career path. The requirements set towards young professionals are changing with great speed. The weak points of socio-economic processes are revealed during economic downturn: companies have to organize new forms of work and interaction with top priority in order to remain functional, and the employees have to adjust to the changed conditions. [6]

It does not matter what route of movement in his career yesterday's graduate chooses, horizontal, when we mean a deeper mastering of the specialty, scientific research in his field, the most precise study of all details and nuances, or vertical, when we are talking about promotion and reaching the top positions in the company, an absolutely necessary condition for success is the mastery of the so-called flexible skills, or Soft Skills. Under these conditions, universities are facing more and more new objectives, one of which is the development of students' soft skills. The labor market is in demand for specialists who have not only professional, but also soft skills. The model of professional competencies divides skills into soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills are an innovative component of educational content at all academic levels, related to preparing students for various types of educational and professional activities both in the present and in the future. Besides, these are extra-professional skills, required and applicable in any profession, which help to solve life tasks and work with other people, as a human being is a social creature, and his whole life occurs in the society among other people.

However, many students, according to the employment survey, are unaware of the fact that there are requirements for flexible skills, so universities need to inform students about the requirements imposed by employers. [5]

Regardless of occupation, everyone needs at least some soft skills. Soft skills are often valued much more, because a person who is capable of quick learning, open to new information, stress-resistant, can appreciate time, work successfully in a team, is capable of completing this or that workload or project meeting deadlines, can easily and quickly

master any professional competencies and skills, the so-called hard skills, and therefore has a significant priority over other applicants in the labor market. Although flexible or "soft" skills are sometimes referred to as the 21st century skills, more than 100 years ago, scientists were already interested in this topic and conducted a research in this field. Scholars from Harvard, Stanford, and the Carnegie Foundation discovered that "flexible skills are 85% of a person's success in a profession; hard skills are only 15%." [10]

Hard skills are narrow professional skills, knowledge and expertise that are needed for specific tasks in daily work, and they allow one to perform work duties. For example, for a designer "hard skills" would be proficiency in graphic editing, website design, designing brochures, logos, developing printing templates for all kinds of advertising; for a tour operator – knowledge of geography, ethics, psychology, business communication skills, a specialist should be a confident PC user, have a good command of foreign languages.

To be successful at work, regardless of the field in which a person works – tourism, hospitality, management, law, service, design and others, one needs to be able to get along well with clients, colleagues, chiefs, subordinates. Soft skills are useful in any field, they allow a person to be successful regardless of the work specifications and areas, are related to the emotional intelligence and are formed in childhood. However, we believe that we can develop soft skills at a young age as well, in this particular case at university (RSUTS), because students are trained in client-oriented areas, with people interaction in the center of them. Moreover, immediate profit, success, confident and strong steady position in the market depend on such important skills as successful communication at all levels, flexible positive thinking, the ability to make quick decisions and others. If a person is fluent in at least some soft skills, he will feel confident and free in his specialty at any time, regardless of external factors – such as economic and political recessions, pandemics, natural cataclysms.

The research group of the Management Department of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in the city of Perm as a result of their work have identified the top 10 Soft Skills that are in the most demand among employers, as shown on the Recruitment Websites globally and in Russia¹:

¹ <https://perm.hse.ru/news/243254110.html>

The World:

1. Ability to handle complex problems
2. Critical thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordination
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Decision Making
8. Customer Focus
9. Ability to Negotiate
10. Cognitive Flexibility

Russia:

1. Active Learning
2. Coordination
3. Ability to Negotiate
4. Teaching Other People
5. Information Literacy
6. Customer Focus
7. Oral Communication
8. Ability to Solve Difficult Problems
9. Operating Literacy
10. Time Management

Thus, we see that in Russia there is an accent on studying; hence higher education serves as a definite launching point for further growth and development in the professional sphere.

There are a number of classifications of soft skills. We will outline some of them:

I. Flexible skills are divided into four groups:

- Communicative (communication and the ability to understand other people),
- Intellectual (critical thinking, creativity)
- Volitional (time and emotion management), leadership (managing others, teamwork).

II. Soft skills can be:

- universal ones – personal effectiveness (information gathering and processing, resource management, self-reflection, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, goal setting, stress tolerance), interaction with people (communication, customer focus, non-violent communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence),
- management skills – mentoring, project and team management, task setting and evaluation, leadership, planning, task control, giving feedback, delegation.

III. In entrepreneurship the following skills are highlighted: business planning, financial modelling, un-

derstanding of marketing processes, business promotion skills and reputation management.

The formation and development of these crucial skills in the classroom should start at the very beginning of the studies and continue throughout the entire process. Then, by the end of their studies, future young professionals will already have developed soft skills and be able to use them in automatic mode. At RSUTS, according to the curriculum, some faculties – High School of Service, High School of Management, Economics and Law, High School of Design – provide learning of foreign language during three semesters, while the Tourism and Hotel Management specialties have seven semesters of foreign language study. In both cases, we are able to arrange and structure classes in such a way that, in addition to solving a number of equally important problems, such as the development of communicative competence, the formation and development of creative potential, divergent type of thinking, to give the learners the opportunity to form, develop, train and improve flexible skills.[2]

These tasks are not only possible to solve in a face-to-face format, but also in a distance or blended learning format, which expands our possibilities and gives students access to a variety of resources. In addition, it is important to understand that as a result of the development of information technology on such a huge scale and at such an incredible speed, soft skills development tasks need to be adapted. Communication, both personal and business, is online, hence we train not only personal communication, but take it beyond the recently familiar format and offer students tasks that train online interaction, such as video seminars, conferences, presentations, chat rooms, etc.

It is worth noting that these activities fully meet the requirements for the development of all required competences according to the educational programme – implementation of business communication (UK-4), selection of communication style ...depending on the goals and conditions of partnership (UK-4.1.), conducting dialogue for cooperation in social and professional spheres (UK-4.2.), business correspondence (UK-4.3.)

Gina Watson Mitchell notes: "More research on flexible skills is needed in order to explore this field and develop methodologies that are applicable in business education." [11]

Through an example assignment we will show that it is possible within a single project to shape,

develop and reinforce a range of flexible skills at the same time.

Students are given an assignment to prepare a radio or TV programme – a business review or a talk show on "Problems, current situation in hospitality business and ways to solve them". Case Study "The Voice of Business" is proposed as a model. [8, p.76-77] We adapt this material to the students' speciality. For example, we consider the following topics as suggested:

- Company profiles (any successful company in hospitality),
- Profiles of businesspeople (hoteliers, restaurant owners, etc.)
- Interviews with CEOs, entrepreneurs,
- Hospitality business update,
- Future of hospitality and tourism business,
- Book and journal reviews,
- Job vacancies in tourism,
- News in current situations,
- Traffic and weather reports

The students can also suggest their own topics, extending this list. Consideration is given to alternative formats at the discretion of the students: either a video is made and shown in class, or a role-play using video clips that the students recorded earlier in the preparatory process. The videos could include, for example, stories about problematic situations in hotels and restaurants.

However, before we start this activity, we think it is useful to do an introductory activity: the students are given articles to read and discuss, e.g. "Top 10 soft skills for customer service jobs"². The list of soft skills for customer service jobs might include: communication, listening, self-control, positive attitude towards the situation, process, clients, etc., assertiveness, conflict resolution, empathy, taking responsibility, sense of humour. The list of soft skills can also be extended by focusing on the diversity of these skills and their variability. For example:

- Nonverbal Communication
- Open-mindedness
- Courtesy
- Insightful Questions
- Problem Sensitivity
- Bearing

² <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/top-soft-skills-for-customer-service-jobs-2063746>

- Patience
- Stress Tolerance
- Encouragement
- Adaptability
- Quick Thinking
- Mediation
- Facilitation
- Accountability
- Diplomacy
- Compassion
- Approachability
- Humility
- Problem sensitivity
- Imagination
- Flexibility

etc.

It is recommended to relate this topic to "Jobs in hospitality/tourism/design (depending on the field of study of the students) and ask them to complete the following chart:

The students compile the list of professions entirely by themselves, or we include only a few professions in the table and ask them to expand the list. This depends on the degree of preparation. However, we recommend focusing on individual work, because self-activity, along with increasing communicative competence of students, will contribute to their personal formation as participants of this activity. It is necessary to focus the whole learning process on active independent work of students, to create conditions for their self-expression and self-development [3]. This is followed by a discussion in pairs or in groups about what soft skills students themselves have and what skills they need to develop in themselves. It is interesting to see how students assess themselves and what they can say about their peers. At this stage, during the group discussion, the students themselves can point out those who have strong leadership qualities, or these guys themselves suggest their own candidacy to organise follow-up projects. Obviously, since we are talking about what qualities students have and what needs to be worked on, the discussion should be conducted tactfully, in a comfortable psychological atmosphere, inviting only those who wish to speak.

The entire service industry is customer-focused, hence the requirement for employees to

have soft or interpersonal skills is obvious. No matter how the interaction with the customer takes place, whether it is live, by phone, email, chat rooms or social media, we highlight the fact that the customer must always feel a sincere desire on the part of the employee to help them, to be involved in the situation. In addition, it should be noted that these skills can be learned, they can be easily trained if special technologies and techniques are used, and the focus of attention is put on specially designed tasks. We hold a discussion on this topic, thus motivating stu-

dents not just to do the task, but encouraging them to feel responsible for the process and their personal involvement in it. At this stage, it is worth asking students to brainstorm and identify which soft skills are most important in their specialty, which skills each of them possesses to a higher or lower degree, and what else is worth developing in themselves. In this way we additionally involve analytical thinking – we need to analyse, assess and make certain conclusions, and thereby clearly outline a trajectory for further development.

Tabl. 1. Jobs in tourism: hard and soft skills

Jobs in tourism*	Hard skills	Soft skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tour operator • Tour agent • Information office specialist • Tour guide • Receptionist 		

* the speciality of the participants is indicated

In the process, it is necessary to identify and select those who will be responsible for the project (1-2 students). In this way, management skills are developed – the students themselves within the group decide who can and wants to be responsible for the organisation, the distribution of topics, timing, structuring of the whole programme and work within the project. We observe who of the students are comfortable and eager to take responsibility for the work and other participants, and who are more comfortable when some amount of work is delegated to them, which is no less important. The whole process of preparation as well as the direct presentation of the completed work occurs in teams. Teams with clear, reasonable goals are usually able to go further ... and will have a greater sense of unity in the pursuit of their achievements [4]. This format enables participants to interact and communicate within a group of people – teamwork skills are formed and developed through which learners learn to listen and hear each other, defend their position, point of view or vice versa, concede and compromise, find mutually beneficial alternatives, make decisions and take responsibility for them. In this process, the strengths and weaknesses of the participants can be identified, and it becomes clear who and what needs to be worked on, who has innate leadership qualities and who, on the contrary, feels better in the role of performer, which is

also highly valued in teamwork. It is crucial to create a comfortable psychological climate in which all participants are able to unlock their creative, professional and personal potential. In this regard, the role of the teacher is very important. Despite the fact that project activities are an independent activity, the project participants can ask for advice. However, the time, quantity and duration of these consultations are precisely regulated, as a result of which students learn how to interact with other people, which is also one of the tools for developing emotional intelligence and an ethics of cooperation.

At this stage, it is worth fixing the result first and then gently asking participants to move on: those who prefer to take on a leadership role can be recommended to study the topic in more detail, find resources, developments, materials and plunge into the problem, while those who have only been in an executive role before can be asked to organize some of the work, try to take responsibility for the process, people, results, learn to delegate the work. Thus, we motivate students to shift their usual focus somewhat. Although it is difficult to track, measure or show the dynamics of soft skills development, unlike hard ones, where exams or attestations are used, significant positive dynamics can be observed over an academic year or even a semester. The successful presentation of the final result of a project, which

depends to a large extent on a properly organised and structured preparation process, is the best mechanism for motivating students to undertake subsequent assignments and projects. Such a form of work inspires students.

In addition, it is worth noting the following aspect: the direct dependence of the level of emotional intelligence (EQ) and the degree of development of a person's creative potential. Emotional intelligence is the sum of a person's skills and abilities to recognize emotions, understand the intentions, motivation and desires of other people and their own, and the ability to control their emotions and those of other people in order to solve practical problems. Emotional susceptibility determines the effectiveness of the use of skills. Moreover, interpersonal and emotional management skills can play a key role in helping students better cope with the complex aspects of their study, so we can talk about the link between EQ and academic performance. [7]

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, studied the problem of emotions and control over emotions. He believed that the first laws of ethics, such as the "Code of Laws of Hammurabi" (18th century BC, Babylon) or the edict of Emperor Ashoka, could be considered the first known attempts to curb and control the emotions. The emergence of the concept of emotional intelligence introduced by psychologists is correlated with the development of the business environment and the emergence of neuroscience. Before its introduction, the world lived with a strong belief that IQ is a major indicator of success. In today's world, scientists, notably Daniel Goleman, a researcher in the field, talk about emotional intelligence as the new standard of mind. This certainly does not mean that the mastery of academic knowledge has lost its importance, but rather that high IQ alone cannot guarantee success in any field of activity. Goleman notes that "in order to succeed in a particular field of activity it is necessary to develop personal qualities" [1].

Creative people are more advanced in empathy, the ability to observe people, and other similar traits. This is an integral part of the creative personality. However, such people have serious difficulties with the perception of feedback, self-control, the ability to perform tasks within a certain time limit, understanding of emotions, both of other people and their own, following instructions. Thus, an inverse correlation between the level of EQ and creative potential

has been revealed. We recommend careful observation of the work of creative, artistic students in these projects. Probably, the most appropriate approach with such students would be individual work at the initial stage, and then gradually offer projects in pairs, small groups, and finally in teams. It is advisable to make this transition more smoothly. But the need for this kind of work and flexible skills training for creative people is quite obvious. After all, real freedom comes when there is a choice, that is, you need to be able to create real masterpieces, and at the same time be able to cooperate, negotiate, defend your point of view, and so on. As an example, let's consider collaboration in a group of students specializing in graphic design where mostly creative people study. Our task is to develop soft skills, such as communication, listening, asserting one's point of view, negotiating, and meeting deadlines. Students are offered the task of designing a website project for a company. We start with individual work: everyone thinks over his/her own draft, its content, structure and other details. Then we offer in pairs to discuss, possibly make changes in the finished product and come up with the most appropriate version. Further work is done in small groups where we can offer a round table discussion or a role-playing game – for example, a design studio fulfills an order from a company to develop a site or an advertisement. Students of the Higher School of Design, majoring in Fashion Design, are offered to organize a fashion show in English. At the initial stage, students work individually – creating costumes, and cooperation begins at later stages, when it comes to the place, time of the event, and the sequence of catwalk appearances. Participants agree among themselves, and facilitators are assigned, who are responsible for the whole project.

In the meantime we carry out the formation of communicative competence – we offer a list of lexical units on this topic, as well as phrases for more effective negotiation, preliminary we give an opportunity to listen to the model of negotiations of the designer and the employer. [8, c.18-19]

At the final stage within the feedback students express their opinion and evaluate what they managed to do at a high level, and what still needs to be improved. We pay attention to Soft Skills, which are absolutely necessary in any sphere of professional activity. A teacher's positive feedback is very im-

portant as a motivational tool for further successful cooperation. Moreover, we offer the students to think about what they would like to work on in the future, what projects are interesting and useful for their future work in the profession, thus shaping the learning process within the student-centered education format, focused on creating links between students' interests and learning content, which is much more effective and productive, hence making the process more meaningful for students. In addition, the result of their work is more indicative of them as individuals

and more reflective of who they are at the moment. This tends to lead to a richer, more memorable, more enjoyable, and more motivating learning experience.[9]

Thus, not only do we form and develop communicative competence, which is the main task in foreign language teaching, but we also take a deeper approach to the issue of preparing a future specialist for professional activities, paying attention to the development of soft skills, which in the modern world is an integral part of training capable and qualified staff.

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