SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR ESP CLASS IN DISTANCE MODE
РОЗВИТОК М'ЯКИХ НАВИЧОК ДЛЯ КЛАСУ ESP В ДИСТАНЦІЙНОМУ РЕЖИМІ

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This article investigates theoretical and practical approaches to soft skills acquisition by engineering students at a tertiary level of education. The authors emphasize the importance of soft skills and study the opportunities for their development in ESP class. Within a theoretical approach, the definition of soft skills is given, and different approaches to their classification are presented. This article offers different models of soft skills integration and application into foreign language learning and teaching, gives theoretical background, proves the importance of soft skills, investigates students' attitudes and needs.

From the practical point, different online activities for the soft skills implementation are suggested and analysed. This article is called to answer the following practical questions: what skills to teach and in what way, how to incorporate soft skills development into the modern process online, and what teaching strategies suit better in this context. Therefore, the authors suggest classifying soft skills into personal, social and content-reliant. Despite the fact that modern curricula are overloaded with content-based material and therefore, it is difficult to integrate the aspect of soft skills development, the English language curriculum is usually designed to successfully address this issue as language learning includes socializing and communication processes.

After a thorough analysis of Ukrainian and foreign sources considering soft skills development among engineering students during ESP lessons, the authors state that these skills may be successfully and efficiently developed within the English language course. Switching the paradigm of learning and moving from an educator role to a facilitator is of crucial importance.

Key words: *soft skills, ESP, online activities, language learning, engineering students.*

У статті досліджуються теоретичні та практичні підходи до набуття навичок "м'якого" спілкування студентами інженерних спеціальностей у закладах вищої освіти. Автори підкреслюють важливість навичок "м'якого" спілкування та досліджують мож-ливості їх розвитку на заняттях з англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням. У межах теоретичного підходу дається визначення soft skills та представлено різні підходи до їх класифікації. У статті запропоновано різні моделі розвитку "м'яких" навичок у курсі викладання іноземних мов та шляхи їх інтеграції у викладання мов, враховуючи їхнє значення, класифікацію та потреби студентів.

З практичної точки зору запропоновано та проаналізовано різні види діяльності під час онлайн-заняття, які сприяють розвитку та формуванню "м'яких" навичок. У статті зроблено спробу вирішити наступні практичні завдання: яким навичкам навчати та яким чином, як успішно інтегрувати розвиток "м'яких" навичок у сучасний онлайн-процес вивчення іноземної мови, та які стратегії навчання краще підходять у цьому контексті. Автори пропонують класифікувати "м'які" навички на особистісні, соціальні та змістові. Автори приходять до висновку, що через перевантаженість сучасних навчальних програм зі спеціальних дисциплін важко виділити окремо час на занятті для розвитку "м'яких" навичок під час викладання спеціальних технічних дисциплін. Але ці завдання можуть бути успішно реалізовані в межах викладання іноземної мови, оскільки вивчення мови власне включає різні аспекти формування цих навичок.

Після ретельного аналізу українських та зарубіжних джерел, присвячених дослідженню розвитку "м'яких" навичок у студентів інженерних спеціальностей на заняттях з англійської мови спеціального вжитку, автори стверджують, що ці навички можна успішно та ефективно розвивати в межах цього курсу. Велике значення у зміні навчальної парадигми відіграє роль викладача як фасилітатора.

Ключові слова: *м'які навички, іноземна мова за професійним спрямуванням, онлайн технології, вивчення мови, студенти інженерних спеціальностей.*

Introduction. Global transformation processes influence not only the production, economic, and labour market spheres but the educational ones as well. Modern education must be more responsive and quick-reacting to these changes as education itself is a prerequisite for successful and positive changes in the mentioned spheres. In connection with this, many scientists claim that students must get not only "hard skills" during their study but much greater attention should be paid to "soft skills" development. Students should demonstrate cooperative, communicative skills and critical thinking along with knowledge in their field of expertise. A globalisation process and an intensive transformation toughen the requirements to today's engineering graduates and future job applicants despite the emergencies and online education.

Hard skills are related to a certain discipline, academic skills and expertise, "soft" skills are defined as those that have to deal with people, communication and socializing. Researchers characterize "soft" skills as "a combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values" [6, p. 300]. Developed "soft" skills can add to best adaptation and positive behaviour, simplify dealing with challenges and benefit professional growth.

Problem of research. The COVID-19 pandemic, and then – the military state in Ukraine, caused the unbiased transition to distance learning which made soft skills development of utmost importance. Students and educators complain about experiencing a lack of communication, interaction and cooperation. These circumstances require educators to be flexible, adaptive, and up-to-date to demonstrate high performance in new distance mode settings. Alongside, they have to help students with new skills and

knowledge acquisition as well as with successful integration into the labour market. The soft skills development in a foreign language (ESP) class via online facilities needs a quantitative and qualitative in-depth study to fill in the methodological gap.

Aims of the article. The research aims are to offer and characterize online activities in ESP classes ensuring soft skills development, to investigate the main difficulties connected to soft skills development during online sessions and the ways of overcoming them, and to study the activities that might be applied during online English classes to develop soft skills.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Many research studies are dedicated to soft skills development among future specialists. Some scientists suggest these skills be trained within a separate discipline or course, while others speak about their integration into different professional disciplines claiming that you cannot disintegrate "soft" skills from "hard" skills.

Haselberger et al. identified 22 "soft" skills: communication, customer/user orientation, teamwork, learning skills, creativity/innovation, decision-making, analysis skills, management skills, adaptability to change, leadership, commitment/identification with the organization, results orientation, continuous improvement, negotiation, professional ethics, tolerance to stress, self-awareness, life balance, conflict management, cultural adaptability, contact network, research and information management skills [4, p.9]. Researchers speak not only about the importance of soft skills in modern realia but about the importance of an educator, and an instructor as a facilitator. In their research, they give recommendations how to develop all the skills mentioned above.

In their study, Abbas and Hum emphasize the importance of described soft skills in teaching and learning English. They note that these skills are necessary for promotion as success results not only from intelligence but also from the ability to communicate and cooperate [1].

Among the Ukrainian researchers who added to the soft skills teaching theory, we might mention Kniaz H., Chuchno O. [6], who conducted the assessment of students' soft skills; Korniush H. [5], describing activities in foreign language lessons that ensure soft skills acquisition; Kushmar L., Kolot L, Dubinina O. [7] investigating soft skills development among the future specialists during ESP lessons; Shestel O. et al. [13], who studied interactive technologies for soft skills during foreign language lessons; Lavrysh Yu. [8], investigating social interaction during ESP lessons.

Main part. Soft skills are the complement to hard skills that aim to enhance job performance and career prospects. They are more flexible and less specific as compared to hard skills, therefore, they find much broader and universal applications. Shobron S. et al.

[12] in their research proves the importance of continuing soft skills development and define the following methods to be applied: direction (gives students an understanding of the activities); training (meaning life training); assignment (for strengthening the skills); habit, escort (all the tasks and activities are guided); efforts of students and approach to be used. The researchers classify soft skills into personal, social and content-reliant.

Knyaz H. and Chuchno O. [6] divide soft skills into *personal* skills, that are connected to learning, professional ethics, tolerance to stress, commitment, creativity/innovation, life balance, and self-awareness; *social* skills that include communication, teamwork, ability to negotiate and manage conflicts, to lead; *content-reliant ones* that are the skills needed to be customer-oriented, easily adapting to changes, to participate in decision -making and to manage the situation. Scientists are trying to estimate the level of soft skills among students of different years of study. The results of the survey demonstrate that the absolute majority of the students assess their level of teamwork skills, the ability to clearly express oneself at the intermediate level. While the ability to listen to others was ranked as high, and more than 90% of the respondents, irrespective of the year of study, think that they are good or very good at recognizing, analysing, and finding solutions to problems, evaluating information and their own experience. The ability to use modern technology for study purposes was ranked as high. The least developed skills, in students' opinion, are the self-management ones. Also, students believe that their teachers devote insufficiently or hardly any attention to soft skills development.

Didenko Zh. classifies soft skills into: communicative, personal and professional [3]. Shakir defines the following soft skills: communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving, ability to cooperate with others, lifelong learning and information management skills, ethics and professional morals, and leadership skills [11]. So, we can notice that all the soft skills classifications are similar and put emphasis on socializing.

Also, scientists emphasize the special importance of communication, leadership, organization, self-motivation and creativity and regard them as necessary characteristics of future employees. Robles, conducting his research among the executives and employers as to the soft skills they want to see in their employees, listed communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork and work ethics.

Korniush H. [5] and other researchers state that English lessons have valuable resources for soft skills development. During English classes, students have many opportunities to learn and practice soft skills especially if a communicative approach is

implemented. Successful implementation and development depend on the teacher or educator, their expertise and understanding of the problem, approach and methods used. While planning the lesson and setting the goals, educators should know what skills they want to develop, how to develop them, and how to integrate everything into a study process.

Some scientists claim that modern curricula are overburdened with content-based material so it is difficult to add soft skills development to them. But the English language curriculum can successfully cope with this task as language learning includes socializing and communication processes. It can be rightfully considered as a proliferate ground for soft skills development.

Tevdovska E. [15] researched the ways of soft skills introduction into the language curriculum. Although these soft skills are already present in the curriculum, she emphasizes that the students should be aware of this fact. And here she applies a direction principle.

A conducted study showed that the following activities might be used for soft skills acquisition.

1. **Problem-solving activities** which provide the students with a task/problem which needs to be solved. This kind of activity helps develop teamwork skills, and tolerance, and deepens content-based knowledge. Problem-solving may include not only ethical issues and dilemmas but the solutions to some engineering problems. For engineering students, educators can suggest solving some up-to-date problems in their subject field, discuss the problem in groups and suggest the most effective solutions. Engineering students of the KPI may publish the results or solutions in the proceedings of a conference [2].

2. **Group work** involving discussions and debates, **role plays and dialogues**.

It is the most efficient, widely-used and useful task within the curriculum for 3-6 year engineering students. Students prepare reports on the topic in the field of their subject area. This task is successfully realized with the help of online technologies. Students share the main results, create Powerpoint presentations and participate in active discussions. These task help develop information-search skills, critical analysis skills and the ability to stand one's opinion. Using Zoom and Google Meet functionalities, a teacher can divide students into different chat rooms for discussions, then students can present the results of their discussions and participate in the debates. Students are invited to use additional materials, to conduct search due to online technologies. Pedagogical mastery lies in the ability to form pairs or groups correctly taking into account students' relationships and level of knowledge. It will promote better understanding and cooperation. It is important to assess every student, each participant should present or prove their activity. Weaker students should not hide behind the back of

better students. So the teacher should be aware of this fact while forming pairs or groups.

Writing in the form of essays and blogs, creative writing.

These tasks can stimulate creative and critical thinking and, students learn to formulate and present their vision, and their point of view, to speak their ideas. The abundant topic for writing may concern moral and ethical problems, technical innovations.

Educators also note the importance of self-assessment and peer assessment within the context of different tasks. Students should learn to be objective and critical. The key to a successful implementation of all these tasks is a friendly and cooperative atmosphere, friendly group and interpersonal relationships as well as interesting topics suggested by the teacher and their pedagogical skills.

The use of social networks at English lessons has been investigated. The authors concluded that social networks whose primary purpose is to provide communication can be successfully applied to a study process and help a lot in developing communicative skills [10].

Attention to the "soft" skills can propel students' motivation. The distance learning mode can be an opportunity to apply a range of tasks made possible due to this mode: the use of the latest information and web technologies, debates, discussions and teamwork in breakout rooms. These can motivate students and create a positive psychological atmosphere [14].

Conclusions and future applications. We can conclude that soft skills, being human abilities promote personal communication covering professional skills as well (coaching, leading, and interaction with clients). The most effective activities for soft skills development are: writing blogs, making video logs, debates on a topic and teamwork. After careful analysis of local and foreign opinions about soft skills development among engineering students during ESP lessons, we came to the conclusion that these skills may be successfully and efficiently developed within the language course. Tasks which help soft skills development can be fruitfully embedded into the foreign language curriculum. They include different activities that make students use and develop their soft skills.

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