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THE FORMATION OF SOFT SKILLS FOR FUTURE AVIATION SPECIALISTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

***Abstract.** The study is devoted to the problem of future aviation specialists' soft skills formation in the process of Aviation English training. Based on the results of the scientific publications' analysis, it has been proven that nowadays ability to communicate, solving problems and making decisions, critical thinking, mobility, personal creative potential, flexibility for living conditions' adaptation are the key to the future specialists' competitiveness. Today, this is a real challenge for higher education, since educational programs (courses) in English for Specific Purposes must include, in addition to the linguistic component, the training of a number of soft skills in order to meet the defined needs of higher*

education applicants for each specific educational context. A theoretical analysis of the essence of the concept of «soft skills» has been carried out and the relevance of aviation specialists mastering the soft skills necessary for their future professional activity has been substantiated. After the analysis of the «soft skills» concept, existing classifications and domestic legislative documents regarding the development of soft skills of higher education institutions' graduates as key to adaptation in rapidly changing conditions, soft skills, which should be possessed by future aviation specialists in the process of foreign language professional training, have been singled out. It has been found that for the effective soft skills' formation within the educational discipline «Aviation English», future aviation specialists must be offered specially developed complexes of communicative exercises and other types of foreign language communicative activities, game technologies or active teaching methods. Therefore, the development and use of foreign language communicative educational activities, which will contribute to increasing the level of future aviation specialists' soft skills, have been determined as prospects for further research.

Keywords: Aviation specialist, communication, English for Specific Purposes, foreign language professional training, «soft skills» («flexible» skills).

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ФОРМУВАННЯ SOFT SKILLS МАЙБУТНІХ АВІАФАХІВЦІВ В ІНШОМОВНІЙ ПРОФЕСІЙНІЙ ПІДГОТОВЦІ

Анотація. Дослідження присвячене проблемі формування soft skills майбутніх авіафахівців у процесі навчання англійської мови професійного спрямування. На основі результатів аналізу наукових публікацій доведено, що в умовах сучасного ринку праці здатність до комунікації, розв'язання проблем та прийняття рішень, критичне мислення, мобільність, особистісний творчий потенціал, гнучкість до адаптації умов життя є запорукою конкурентоспроможності майбутніх фахівців. На сьогодні це справжній виклик для вищої освіти, оскільки навчальні програми (курси) з англійської мови для спеціальних цілей повинні включати крім лінгвістичного компоненту, навчання ряду soft skills, щоб відповідати визначеним потребам здобувачам вищої освіти для кожного конкретного освітнього контексту. Здійснено теоретичний аналіз сутності поняття «soft skills» та обґрунтовано актуальність опанування авіаційними фахівцями soft skills, необхідних для їхньої майбутньої професійної діяльності. Після проведеного аналізу поняття «soft skills» наявних класифікацій та



вітчизняних законодавчих документів щодо розвитку soft skills випускників закладів вищої освіти як ключових для адаптації у швидкозмінних умовах, виокремлено soft skills, якими повинні володіти майбутні фахівці авіаційних спеціальностей у процесі іноземної професійної підготовки. З'ясовано, що для ефективного формування soft skills у межах навчальної дисципліни «Англійська мова професійного спрямування» майбутнім авіафахівцям необхідно пропонувати спеціально розроблені комплекси комунікативно спрямованих вправ та інші види іноземної комунікативної діяльності, ігрові технології чи активні методи навчання. Тож перспективними напрямками подальшої роботи визначено розробку та використання комунікативно спрямованих видів іноземної навчальної діяльності, які будуть сприяти підвищенню рівня soft skills майбутніх фахівців авіаційних спеціальностей.

Ключові слова: авіафахівець, англійська мова для спеціальних цілей, іноземна професійна підготовка, комунікація, «soft skills» («гнучкі» навички).

Problem statement. A decade or two ago, «narrow» specialists were among the most successful professionals in the labor market. However, technology has fundamentally altered the traditional concept of professionalism. With the internet, finding highly specific information takes only a few seconds. Consequently, technological advancements are leading to a change in employment models. Today, «narrow professionalism» is no longer an advantage; in some cases, it can even lead to career stagnation due to a lack of so-called «soft skills». These skills, also known as «flexible» or «social» skills, are crucial for effective participation in academic and professional processes. They determine a specialist's ability to interact and communicate successfully, regardless of their specific professional focus.

Therefore, it becomes critical for employers to pay proper attention not only to the high level of «hard skills» in future specialists – specifically in aviation professionals – but also to their level of «soft skills». This is because the primary requirement of modern society for future specialists is the ability to quickly solve problems and make decisions, think critically, be mobile, act independently, realize their personal creative potential, and be flexible enough to adapt to a rapidly changing and developing environment.

Domestic legislative documents, namely the Law of Ukraine «On Higher Education» [8] and the Higher Education Development Strategy for 2022-2032 [10],

emphasize that skills such as adaptability, communication, creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork are of key importance for professionals amid dynamic economic transformations. This underscores the relevance of developing soft skills in higher education graduates as crucial for adapting to rapidly changing conditions. Therefore, the cultivation of soft skills should be one of the primary focuses of professional training for contemporary graduates – future aviation specialists.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent studies and publications have increasingly focused on the development of soft skills, also referred to as «flexible skills» or «sociable skills». The formation of these skills has become a subject of scientific inquiry for numerous domestic and international researchers. The works of O. Kulbabska and O. Semenoh, for example, are dedicated to the peculiarities and factors influencing the development of soft skills among philology students in the context of the emerging information society. O. Glazunova, T. Voloshyna, and V. Korolchuk consider soft skills to be a key component of the professional competence of modern specialists. The development of soft skills as a crucial element of a professional's competitiveness in the information technology field has been explored by N. Dluhunovych, L. Ivanova, K. Koval, and T. Scaffidi. An increasing number of researchers, including M. Armstrong, L. Balabanova, A. Baron, M. Vasylova, C. Wein-

berger, S. Wilson, C. Woodruff, B. Danylyshyn, R. James, H. Duhinets, D. Ilnytskyi, D. A. Urs, Yu. Kateli, M. Morozova, and S. Shestakova, are focusing their research on the specifics of developing soft skills in future specialists across various sectors.

A. Zhytnytska, O. Korniyush, I. Miroshnyk, and I. Paslavska have dedicated their work to the formation of soft skills during the teaching of foreign languages in higher education institutions. The researcher O. Osova focused on the soft communication skills of higher education students in the process of learning a foreign language for professional purposes. She concluded that the main difficulties in forming soft communication skills arise during the acquisition and use of professional terminology, adaptation to professional situations, and the process of cross-cultural communication [7].

The formation of soft skills in higher education students through the use of distance learning platforms in foreign language instruction has been a subject of research by A. Shchekhlova and Zh. Didenko. The use of game-based technologies and active learning methods in foreign language classes for the development of flexible skills has been explored in the works of N. Burmakina, A. Haraha, and L. Pinchuk. Despite the contributions of these researchers, the specific development of soft skills in future aviation specialists has not yet received sufficient attention.

The purpose of the article is to investigate the concept of «soft skills» and to substantiate the relevance of aviation specialists mastering soft skills necessary for their future professional activity.

Presentation of basic material. Today, amid globalization and Ukraine's integration into the European educational space, foreign language proficiency, particularly in English, is a prerequisite for a specialist's competitiveness in the job market. Language skills enable effective international communication and the exchange of experience and best practices.

For aviation professionals, English for specific purposes (ESP) is essential for mastering critical and relevant documents. In this context, language learning is not a mere auxiliary subject but an integrated component of all aviation training.

Therefore, the educational component «English for Specific Purposes» has significant potential for developing in-demand soft skills, particularly the communicative skills of future aviation professionals, which is reflected in the defined program learning outcomes. ESP instruction has a specific nature due to its applied focus on a concrete subject area – the aviation industry. A significant part of its content involves learning aviation terminology, specialized vocabulary, and the specifics of professional discourse for a given aviation specialty. Simultaneously, the focus of foreign language training remains on communicative skills, which reflect the level of proficiency in communicative activities and the abilities needed for effective future professional performance. Consequently, the communicative skills of future aviation professionals, as a crucial component of their professional competence and a part of their soft skills, largely determine their level of professional mastery and their ability to communicate effectively in a professional context.

Thus, given the importance of soft skills for successful professional self-realization and the limited opportunities for their development within most traditional curricula, a relevant task for higher education is to integrate the targeted formation of soft skills into the process of learning ESP.

Today, the concept of «soft skills» has not been sufficiently researched in science, and therefore there is no consistent classification of them. Researcher O. Deliaa sees «soft skills» as social skills of the individual that can be classified into interpersonal, as the interaction of leadership qualities, organizational skills and communication skills, which include com-



municative and managerial, namely: the ability to establish interpersonal relationships, the ability to conduct discussions, decision-making, the ability to create effective teams taking into account cultural differences, the ability to resolve conflict situations, persuasion skills, conducting negotiations, oratory and presentation skills [1].

Some scientists define soft skills as a complex of interconnected personality qualities that ensure effective interpersonal interaction, teamwork and achievement of professional goals thanks to critical, creative thinking and emotional intelligence [9].

Researchers Dana Sorana Urs and Yolanda-Mirela Catelly, dealing with the need for soft skills in the tertiary engineering education curriculum, conclude that soft skills should be included in the tertiary education curriculum widely range from language and communication abilities, through personal development and managerial one, and up to cultural sensitivity and work ethics [11]. Conducting a Soft Skills – Student Questionnaire, they singled out a number of soft skills, such as: foreign language skills; stress management; pro-active motivated approach to academic study / extracurricular activities / career planning & development; (self)organization and time management; personality development (creativity, intuition, confidence, assertiveness); technical/business/written/oral communication (presentations, meetings, reports etc.); cultural sensitivity; team-working; planning and prioritizing learning/professional activity [11, p. 50].

Researcher O. Osova, summarizing the approaches to the definition of «soft skills» available in the scientific and pedagogical literature, and stating the fact that these skills are an integral condition for the training of a competent, competitive specialist of the 21st century, considers flexible skills as a complex of interrelated personality qualities that ensure effective interpersonal interaction, teamwork and achievement of professional goals thanks to

critical, creative thinking and emotional intelligence [7, p. 128]. Researcher Zh. Didenko defines that soft skills are a set of abilities or skills necessary for interpersonal communication, achieving a goal through critical and creative thinking, as well as personal components of emotional intelligence that affect the life and employment of future professionals [2, p. 267].

Let us proceed to the consideration of the classification of soft skills. In examining soft skills, O. Glazunova, T. Voloshyna, and V. Korolchuk proposed a framework for IT specialists, which encompasses the following groups of soft skills: 1) communication skills; 2) personal effectiveness skills; 3) managerial skills; 4) strategic skills; 5) skills of effective information management [4].

The classification of soft skills developed by K. Koval comprises three types of qualities, namely: individual (the ability to make decisions, positive thinking and optimism, etc.); communicative (preparing and delivering effective presentations, interacting with various types of people); managerial (team playing, uniting and motivating a team) [5, p. 165].

According to N. Dluhunovych, the typology of soft skills includes the following categories: personal effectiveness, communication skills, managerial skills, and strategic skills [3, p. 241].

Zh. Didenko singles out three groups of soft skills: (1) communication skills that characterize a person's relationship with others; (2) personal skills that correlate with a person's qualities and characterize his personality in a certain way, with the help of which a person copes with problems, adapts to unusual conditions, knows how to set goals and fulfill them in a certain time, aimed at the person himself, namely managing his emotions, his own development; 3) professional skills, which aim to tackle general vocational tasks in broad terms [2, p. 268]. From the standpoint of the competence approach, scientist I. Miroshnyk developed a classification of soft skills

according to the following groups of skills: 1) personal efficiency skills; 2) communication skills; 3) management skills; 4) strategic skills; 5) skills of effective information management [6, p. 111].

It should be noted that in our study we examine soft skills that are not directly related to the professional activities of future aviation specialists but contribute to their effectiveness. Based on the conducted analysis of the concept of soft skills, their existing classifications, as well as national legislative documents concerning the development of soft skills among higher education graduates as key factors for adaptation in rapidly changing conditions, we argue that future aviation professionals, in the course of their foreign-language professional training, should acquire the following skills:

- communicativeness – the ability to establish contacts, exchange information, knowledge, ideas, and emotions through verbal and non-verbal means of communication in order to achieve mutual understanding and common goals;
- decision-making – the ability to quickly and consciously choose the best option from possible alternatives on the basis of available information analysis;
- critical thinking – the ability to analyze and evaluate information in order to reach well-grounded decisions;
- problem-solving – the ability to identify a problem, analyze its causes, and select the most optimal ways of addressing it;
- adaptability – the ability to adjust to changing environmental conditions, respond productively to challenges and difficulties, and find new solutions;
- teamwork – the ability to cooperate with others by combining efforts, individual skills, and knowledge to accomplish a specific task;
- working under uncertainty – the ability to perform effectively in conditions of incomplete or absent information and the

impossibility of precisely predicting future events or outcomes;

- cognitive flexibility – a cognitive capacity to adapt, generate non-standard solutions, and switch rapidly between different tasks while maintaining self-control;
- emotional intelligence – the ability to effectively use one's own emotions and those of others to achieve goals and overcome difficulties;
- goal orientation – a personality trait directed toward achieving a specific result;
- knowledge management – the ability to recognize new information and apply it to problem-solving;
- time management – the ability to organize one's time efficiently in order to increase productivity, achieve set goals, and improve the balance between work and personal life.

We can claim that teachers of foreign languages of non-philological universities, such as the Ukrainian State Flight Academy, have all the prerequisites and potential for teaching soft skills. Some types of educational activities related to the development of soft skills have already been included and are used in Aviation English. At present, this constitutes a real challenge for higher education, since ESP curricula must incorporate, in addition to the linguistic component, the development of a range of soft skills in order to meet the specific needs of higher education students within each particular educational context. The English teachers at the Ukrainian State Flight Academy are expected to address this challenge by making use of the fact that students' language proficiency at the time of admission is relatively high (approximately B1+ according to the CEFR). This allows English teachers at the Academy to spend more time to focus on foreign language soft skills. In addition, we support the point of view of scientists that «there is a tendency in our globalized market that the demand for hard skills will decrease in comparison with the demand for



soft skills. This is due to the fact that hard skills can be outsourced relatively easily, while the lack of soft skills demands more intense effort/time/qualifications etc. to be compensated» [11, p. 44].

Thus, in order to ensure the mobility of future aviation professionals and provide them with the opportunity to optimally apply the knowledge acquired at the Academy, the system of higher education should be adapted to foster soft skills as essential competencies for globally oriented career development. For the effective formation of soft skills within the process of foreign language professional training, particularly in the framework of the ESP course, future aviation specialists should be offered specially designed sets of communicative exercises, as well as other types of foreign language communicative activities, game-based technologies, and active learning methods that will significantly enhance the level of their soft skills development.

Conclusions and prospects of further research. Today, the problem arises of employers paying due attention not only to the high level of formation of future aviation specialists with professionally significant, narrowly focused qualifications, education and work experience, but also to the level of formation of a complex of universal, interprofessional, social skills in them, which determine effective participation in work and academic processes, determine the ability to effectively interact and relate to the culture of building communication regardless of professional orientation. The development of soft skills among higher education students is a priority in the formation of a professionally successful personality for future aviation specialists. In this context, ESP holds a leading position as an academic discipline. Consequently, we conclude that soft skills are instrumental in achieving success in the future professional activities of aviation specialists, enabling them to adapt to

rapidly changing conditions and meet the challenges of the present day.

The conducted research does not exhaust all aspects of the problem. We see the prospects for further research, in particular, within the educational discipline English for Specific Purposes, in the development of communicatively oriented exercises that will make it possible to increase the level of soft skills of future aviation specialists.

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