The Main Problems of Forming Soft Skills in the Future Career of a Student in a Pandemic

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Abstract
The purpose of the article is to analyze students' self-assessment of the level of soft skills development and the prospects for its improvement in a pandemic. For an adequate and objective study of the stated issues, comparative analysis was most often used. For this purpose, theoretical studies of national and foreign experts were analyzed, which included specific sociological surveys. Prospects for further work are assumed in a detailed study of the factors, conditions and mechanisms for the formation and development of soft skills in students of natural, engineering and technological, medical, social and humanitarian specialties.

Keywords:
Soft skills, career, skills, learn, online.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has exacerbated the quality of education and put new challenges on the agenda. Among them: the readiness of teachers and students for online learning; access to high-speed Internet; the quality and efficiency of assessing the knowledge of schoolchildren and students; organization of entrance and final examinations; changing motivations for learning, interaction between parents and students, etc. Added to this are the difficulties of socializing students, especially younger ones, acquiring communication skills, teamwork, and much more from the sphere of soft skills formation. The pandemic has affected the content of the educational process in Ukraine against the backdrop of significant economic, socio-political problems, an ineffective fight against corruption, and delays in important systemic reforms.

After entering the pandemic phase due to COVID-19 and the ensuing quarantine in most countries of the world, educational institutions began to move online. At the same time, there was a significant differentiation in the closure of educational structures, depending on the degree of development of countries. For example, in the second quarter of 2020, 86% of primary children were actually out of school in low human development countries, compared with just 20% in very high human development countries.

There are significant problems with the online education infrastructure: poor Internet connection and Internet speed, high prices for quality Internet services. For example, buying an annual tariff plan "zoom Professional" in Ukraine costs about 150 USD. USA, which roughly corresponds to the salary of most teachers and teachers of higher education for half a month. Added to this is the lack or poor quality of computers/laptops/tablets/smartphones that support online learning.

Numerous studies show that parent involvement is also critical to the success of online learning environments. For example, the EU report “The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections Based on Existing Literature and Latest International Evidence” notes that parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have different cognitive and non-cognitive skills and the ability to support their children in their learning process at home during isolation. This is manifested in the interconnectedness of the cognitive abilities of parents and children, the quality of parental participation in education, which, in turn, is determined by the family background and the wider social environment.

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Due to historical traditions, the low level of economic development of the country and the social security of citizens, the issues of insurance of the quality of education and the provision of effective assistance to those students who are at risk are practically not on the agenda. The issues of exchange of educational materials and resources between educational institutions, creation of joint or national learning platforms are at the initial stage.

The purpose of the article is to analyze students' self-assessment of the level of soft skills development and the prospects for its improvement in a pandemic.

2. Methodology

For an adequate and objective study of the stated issues, comparative analysis was most often used. To this end, we analyzed the theoretical studies of national and foreign experts, which included specific sociological surveys. It should be emphasized that their analysis was carried out in dynamics, that is, the studies carried out in the middle of 2020 were correlated with the results obtained throughout 2021. The subject of consideration was the analytical and information materials of international organizations, authoritative analytical foreign and national centers. At the same time, methods of analysis and synthesis, generalization, and generalization were actively used. Considerable attention was paid to the analysis of statistical material, which indirectly affects the formation of soft skills of students (listeners) and forms ideas about future career opportunities, the specifics of the labor market, specializations, etc.

3. Research Results

In Ukraine, the definition of "soft skills" in academic, media, political discourses is relatively new and not sufficiently developed, and the task of their formation and development among students during their studies in higher education is extremely relevant.

Of the 1086 respondents who took part in the survey, 63% are students of social and humanitarian specialties (in Ukraine they are traditionally sometimes identified), 11% are representatives of the natural sciences, 19% represented the field of engineering and technical sciences and 7% - medical sciences and health sciences (Fig. 1).

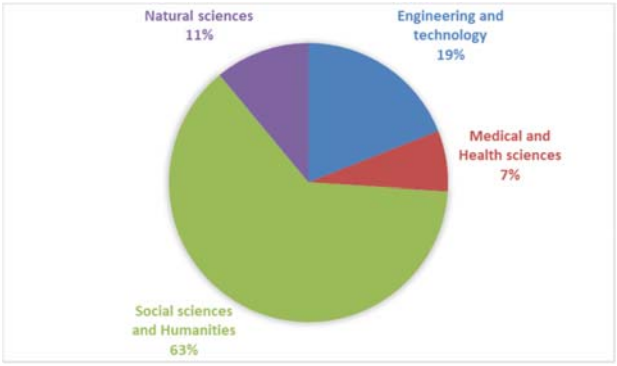

Figure 1: Representation of the specialties of the respondents

Among the respondents who are familiar with the term "soft skills", they learned about it from the following sources: social networks - 34%, live communication - 29%, in the process of studying at a higher school - 26%, at trainings and various courses - 7%, as a result of reading foreign literature - 3% (Fig. 2). As you can see, positions that reflect the ability of students to draw and analyze information in a foreign language are poorly represented.

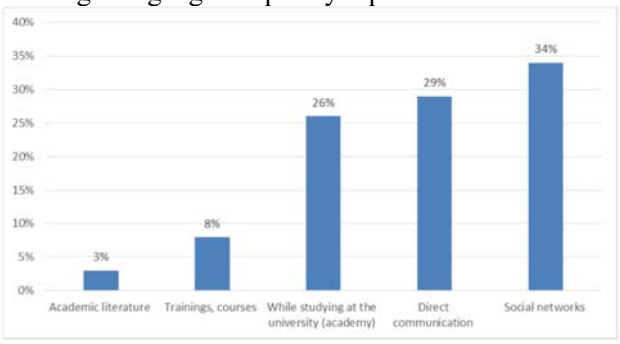

Figure 2: Sources of information about soft skills

Only after this question did we provide the respondents with a definition of the concept of "soft skills" in the following formulation: a set of social skills that allow you to be successful regardless of the specifics of a particular profession: self-organization, interpersonal communication, time management, leadership, conflict resolution, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, creativity, empathy, cognitive flexibility. After getting acquainted with the content of this concept, the students were asked the following question: “What skills, in your opinion, are most important for a successful career, communication and self-realization in our time?”. There were three possible answers: professional (hard skills);

oversubject (soft skills); their totality (hard skills and soft skills). students answered as follows: 57% - "a combination of professional (hard skills) and over-subject (soft skills)", 32% - soft skills, 12% - hard skills (Fig. 3).

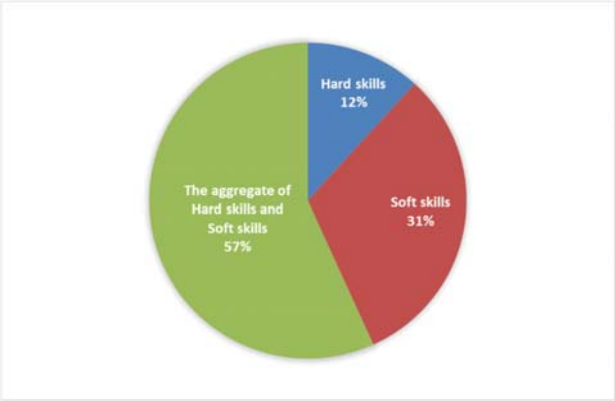

Figure 3: Skills that respondents consider most important for a successful career, communication and self-realization

The next question related to the skills that the respondents have at a sufficient level (in their understanding). Among the main ten proposed, the results were distributed as follows. The following turned out to be more developed: teamwork - 21%, creativity - 17%, critical thinking - 13%, emotional intelligence - 11%, empathy - 10%. Less developed were the skills associated with: cognitive flexibility - 9%, self-organization - 7%, the ability to solve complex problems - 5%, time management - 4%, leadership - 3% (Fig. 4).

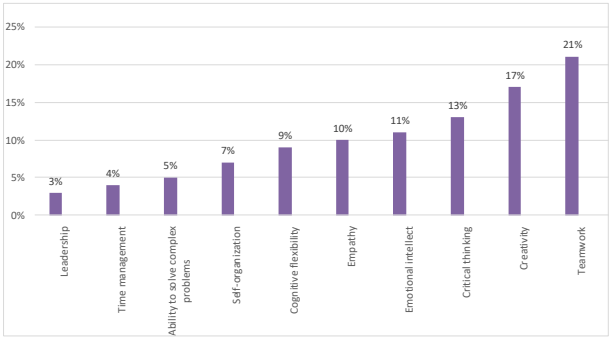

Figure 4: Skills that respondents have at the proper level

Respondents received a significant role in finding and obtaining information about these skills, mainly from social networks and interpersonal communication, and not from teachers, although when compiling work programs for academic disciplines, teachers do indicate those supra-subject competencies that they should form in the process of studying this subject. discipline in students. Unfortunately, the quantity and quality of tasks aimed at developing soft skills leaves much to be desired. This, in turn, leads to an additional search by students for possible ways of their formation and further development in the sectors of non-formal and informal education.

Analysis of the result of the choice between the importance of professional and soft skills for successful self-realization and career growth showed students' understanding of the need for their organic unity.

Respondents rate their skills related to interpersonal communication (the ability to work in a team, empathy), as well as personal cognitive qualities (creativity, critical thinking) quite highly. At the same time, they rate their leadership qualities, their ability to properly manage time and solve complex problems quite low.

At the same time, among the skills that need to be developed in oneself, self-organization was most often indicated, and, only after that, the ability to properly manage time and solve complex problems.
It is noteworthy that the respondents recognize the symbiosis of the humanities and natural disciplines as a necessary condition for the formation of soft skills in formal education. However, as can be seen from the presented results, the quality of teaching in these disciplines, as well as their content, only half satisfies the needs of students (45%). This, in turn, leads them to look for new ways and opportunities to acquire and implement soft skills in other sectors of the educational system.

Among the main forms of organizing learning in formal education, lectures are assigned a small percentage of significance due to the fact that the leading role in their conduct belongs to the teacher, and the activity of students is minimal, since they play the role of a party receiving knowledge. That is why the use of active and interactive teaching methods by the teacher was perceived by them with great enthusiasm.

Cases, brainstorming, and projects became the most popular teaching methods, which most actively involved students in the discussion process when presenting their vision of the problem and presenting possible ways to solve it. However, in the conditions of online learning, it turned out to be extremely

difficult to assist respondents in organizing group work using various types of brainstorming methods. There were no particular problems with the presentation of the results of design work and cases. Little emphasis was placed by respondents on the use of game methods by teachers (especially digital games), the use of which helps to improve teamwork skills and make joint decisions [1-3]. A small percentage of their use is explained by the difficulties that teachers experience in the process of creating them and evaluating the final results of students' activities [4-5]. As the respondents themselves noted, the formation of their critical and creative types of thinking was hampered by a decrease in concentration on the material being studied due to the parallel performance of other types of work by them during the time allotted for the lecture/seminar/practical lesson (attending online classes can be just a formality with the screen turned off).

Among the complex forms of education in the conditions of formal education, which contributed to the development of soft skills, the main emphasis was placed on the meetings of the student scientific society, holding conferences, round tables, and electives. Their organization and holding online was quite organic, since the use of interactive and active methods, except for discussion and some types of brainstorming, was practically not expected [6-8].

This facilitated the work of teachers, who, according to students, should have played the role of a mentor, facilitator, tutor, coach based on their high level of professional and personal competence, knowledge of the psychophysiological characteristics of student development, the use of modern pedagogical technologies, techniques, methods, methods, and as well as continuous improvement of existing skills in the process of teaching a particular discipline. It is these qualities in their totality that are the foundation of the personal, competence, activity, contextual approaches in education.

However, the analysis of the results of the survey of respondents indicated that the majority of teachers with a new role repertoire for them cope at an insufficiently high level, which is explained by the extreme workload of teachers and low wages for their work.

4. Discussions

The online mode does not always allow the use of such teaching methods as group work, discussions, interactive project work, which affects the development of interpersonal skills among students. In addition, long periods of self-isolation can adversely affect the psychological well-being of students and staff, especially for those living alone, international students and students/staff who are outside their place of origin [9-10].

All experts agree that a carefully designed, planned and flexible education system is a key factor in the development of human capital. Obviously, teaching and learning in educational institutions should be focused on the formation and development of such knowledge and skills that have a future and are ahead of the current requirements for specialists of all levels and specializations. Accordingly, there is a certain set of knowledge, skills and abilities that are universal and whose value only grows and actualizes over time. The ability for constant learning and improvement, the tendency to abstract thinking are becoming significant advantages in the world, and more and more individualized.

There is no clearly defined set of characteristics of soft skills in the academic literature. Usually they include: communicative; thinking and problem solving skills; effective teamwork; lifelong learning and information management; entrepreneurship; ethics, morality and professionalism; leadership skills [11-12].

There is a more detailed list of soft skills, in particular: oral and written communication skills; critical and structured thinking; problem solving skills; strong work ethic; etiquette and good manners; politeness; professionalism; personal skills; a responsibility; integrity / reliability; creativity, ability to work in a team; computer literacy; objective self-assessment; the ability to manage conflicts; desire for learning; the ability to negotiate; cultural awareness; empathy, time management; sociality, self-respect.

The list of soft skills elements in the interpretation of many researchers can be continued. There are numerous discussions regarding the content of soft skills, but in the main trend they point to the formation of socially significant qualities of a representative of any profession, necessary for modern life.

5. Conclusions

It should be noted that the concept of soft skills is relatively new in the scientific, media and everyday information space. Even among specialists, there are serious disagreements regarding its essence and content. The importance and practical significance of soft skills is only beginning to be comprehended and analyzed among leaders, managers of educational institutions, and teachers. Understanding and reflection of this phenomenon among students and listeners of Ukraine is at the initial stage. This explains the significant difficulties in adequate perception of the content of questionnaires and surveys among young people. To this should be added the subjective preferences of the organizers of the polls [13-15].

There is a need to increase attention to the formation of soft skills in students in the process of studying at a higher (professional) school due to a number of factors. Among them, a special place is occupied by the following: globally changing conditions for the functioning of the market for services, professions and labor; rethinking the role and importance of the educational system in the socio-economic development of society, the study of problems associated with labor migration, as well as gender and economic inequality; state policy in the field of financing the higher education system; viability of the educational system itself in crisis conditions. The different level of implementation and use of information and communication technologies (digitalization) in economically developed countries and countries with economies in transition is also obvious; ensuring the quality of personnel training against the background of the changing landscape of the system of higher and professional education in the world, Europe and Ukraine; the ratio of cost and quality of educational services; the range of competencies formed in the process of learning (hard skills and soft skills), which ensure the demand for and competitiveness of graduates of higher and professional schools in the modern labor market.

We see the prospects for further work in studying the problem we have stated in a detailed study of the factors, conditions and mechanisms for the formation and development of soft skills in students of natural, engineering and technological, medical, social and humanitarian specialties. At the same time, a significant place should be occupied by the issues of the correlation of hard skills and soft skills, the autonomy of educational institutions in the formation of curricula, forms and methods of teaching academic disciplines, the opportunities and prospects of students (students) in the free choice of those disciplines that work for self-improvement and self-realization of the individual.

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