

PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF “SOFT SKILLS” FORMATION IN FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CONDITIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract: The article highlights the results of a three-stage experimental study on the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers. The necessary organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of “soft skills” in the conditions of a higher education institution are indicated. A comparative analysis of the obtained data of the experimental and control groups was carried out at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. The dynamics of motivational-value, cognitive, personal-volitional, social-communicative, activity-practical, analytical and critical criteria were determined according to the indicators: desire to work in the social sphere; awareness of oneself as an agent of change in the community and attitude to a positive result; the ability to achieve the goal and solve the tasks of professional activity; understanding the importance of developing “soft skills”, the ability to acquire and develop them throughout life; knowledge of socially significant problems of social work; application of innovative technologies, methods and resources of social work; emotional intelligence and empathy; the ability to solve complex situations and react quickly; confidence in own practical skills and competence; ability to negotiate and manage conflicts; knowledge and observance of business and professional ethics; the ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities; the ability to build an effective team to achieve a single result; effective planning and organization of professional activities; orientation to the result of achieving goals; the ability to think in conditions of time shortage and psycho-emotional stress; the ability to make decisions and find alternative options; application of structural and systemic thinking; attentiveness and observation; application of analytical and logical thinking; the ability to establish relationships. The article will be useful for students and teachers who are interested in the professional development of social workers.

Keywords: social work; social workers; professional education; professional training; professional skills; “soft skills”.

1 Introduction

In the modern conditions of the development of Ukrainian society, the transformation of the Ukrainian state and the need to respond to emergency situations, the requirements for the efficiency of the provision of social services and the professionalism of social workers are increasing. The implementation of professional social activities, as a mechanism for the fulfillment of social policy, depends on the level of knowledge, abilities, and skills of the social worker. In particular, we emphasize the importance of the formation and development of “soft skills” as universal, non-specialized, interconnected, acquired, difficult to track, variable, situational, closely related to the nature social and psychological skills that contribute to the implementation of highly effective professional social work and successful career growth.

Since the main stage of the professional development of a social worker is the acquisition of professional education, the formation and development of “soft skills” of students becomes relevant for higher education institutions of Ukraine. Therefore, the focus of our attention is the study of pedagogical aspects of the formation of “soft skills” in future social workers in the conditions of a higher education institution.

Professional education and the peculiarities of the formation and development of soft skills have become the subject of research by many domestic and foreign scientists. In particular, the topics for study include: soft skills as the basis of flexibility, adaptability and the embodiment of competitive qualities of future employees [28]; publications in Scopus are devoted to soft skills [10]; the main determinants of soft skills and the influence of socio-economic and family status on their formation [23]; application of a context-dependent approach to distinguish hard and soft skills [36]; the use of media technologies in the formation of creativity in future psychological and pedagogical specialists [20]; soft skills of a case manager [22]; integration of system thinking skills with multi-criteria decision-making technology for recruitment of job candidates [17]; continuous and professional education, which provides an opportunity to

expand and develop one's own knowledge and skills [7]; development of professional abilities among early career workers and implications for the development of work-based learning [16]; career adaptation, vocation and professional competence of social work students in China, career building prospects [12]; preparation for work and professional development [33]; continuous professional development of child protection social workers in Romania [29]; development of skills of immigrant children [9; 15]; changes during life in the mediation of cognitive and non-cognitive skills [14]; the role of non-cognitive skills [2]; assessment of the consequences of childhood social and emotional skills at the end of life using middle age mediators [26]; the influence of participation in e-sports on the development of 21st century skills in young people: a systematic review [34]; social skills [11]; the use of interthinking for learning the skills of the 21st century in education [32]; strategies and challenges of teachers in teaching 21st century skills [35]; development of soft communication skills in the creative economy [26]; evidence of soft skills [13]; constructivist analysis of cross-sectional data on types of skills [37]; analysis of the demand for technical and soft skills of graduates in the UK [5]; soft skills of emergency management [24]. The publication of G. Mozgova, V. Yevtushenko, and A. Mozgova [25] is devoted to the theoretical justification of the system of formation of soft skills of specialists in the field of marketing based on the competence approach.

Olena Kirdan and Oleksandr Kirdan [18] studied the peculiarities of the formation of “soft skills” of higher education students.

The practical experience of forming “soft skills” in the conditions of a higher education institution is characterized in the study of N. Kolyada and O. Kravchenko [19].

I.P. Krasnoshchok, O.M. Demchenko, and T.O. Kravtsova studied the peculiarities of the use of innovative methods and technologies in the practice of educational institutions of Ukraine for the development of “soft skills” [21].

The development and implementation of clear organizational and pedagogical conditions are the basis of modern experimental research, which ensures the following: the formation of professionally oriented communicative competence in technical higher education institution [31]; forming the readiness of future social workers to organize volunteer activities [6]; formation of readiness of social workers to work with young families [27]; formation of social leadership in future social workers in the conditions of professional training [4].

However, there are not enough scientific studies that highlight the issue of pedagogical aspects of the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers.

The purpose of the study is to determine and experimentally verify the pedagogical conditions for the formation of “soft skills” of social worker students.

2 Method

The experimental study of the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers was carried out in several stages:

- The first stage implies: an interdisciplinary analysis of the chosen topic; definition of the object, subject, tasks and purpose of the research; study of scientific and methodological literature on the formation of “soft skills”; analysis of approaches to the problem of formation of “soft skills” in the implementation of professional training of future social workers. At this stage, the structure of “soft skills” was theoretically substantiated and its content was clarified with the help of expert evaluation; criteria, indicators were identified, characteristics of the levels of formation of “soft skills” among future social workers were

developed; the experimental base for the research was determined, experimental and control groups were formed; selection of diagnostic tools for the experimental stage of the research was carried out.

- The second stage implies: analysis of the current state of manifestation of “soft skills” among future social workers; assessment of effectiveness at the stage of ascertaining experiment in accordance with the determined indicators of the structural components of “soft skills”; development of a structural and functional model of the formation of “soft skills” of students majoring in “Social Work” in the conditions of professional training; study of the organizational and pedagogical conditions for the training of future social workers and their expert assessment regarding the impact on the formation of “soft skills” among students of higher education institutions. At this stage, a formative experiment was organized to clarify the expediency of implementing theoretically grounded organizational and pedagogical conditions that ensure the success of the implementation of the model of formation of “soft skills” in future social workers.

- The third stage is a repeated check of the state of formation of “soft skills” among students of the experimental and control groups, the probability of the obtained results and their statistical significance. It implies formation of conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of “soft skills” in future social workers.

We believe that the following organizational and pedagogical conditions should be taken into account when developing the “soft skills” of future social workers:

- Deepening the knowledge of future social workers about “soft skills” as professionally important skills (meaningful filling of the educational discipline “Technologies of formation of “soft skills” in professional education” and its introduction to the educational and professional program in the specialty “Social work” with the aim of students acquiring knowledge of “soft skills” and means, forms, and methods of their formation and development);
- Organization of an informal environment for the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers (creation of a website with the necessary materials for determining the level of formation of “soft skills”, their shaping and improvement);
- Application of means, forms, and methods of non-formal education to increase the effectiveness of the formation of “soft skills” in the conditions of higher education institutions (use of effective means, forms, and methods of professional training of social workers to increase the level of formation of “soft skills” of students in the conditions of classroom and extra-auditory activities).

The effectiveness of the implementation of the specified organizational and pedagogical conditions was tested experimentally. 260 students (first and second degrees) of higher education institutions of Ukraine took part in the research: Prykarpattia National University named after Vasyl Stefanyk (Ivano-Frankivsk), Ukrainian State University named after Mykhailo Drahomanov (Kyiv). Students studied at the following educational and professional programs: “Social Work” and “Social Pedagogy”. The experimental group (EG) consists of 132 students of higher education, the control group (CG) – 128 people. The experiment was carried out in the conditions of the educational process of training social workers.

The study was carried out taking into account the elements and components of “soft skills”, criteria and their indicators in accordance with the determined levels of formation (Figure 1).

The diagnostic toolkit for conducting the research included the study and analysis of the documentation of the educational program “Social Work” and “Social Pedagogy”: curriculum, typical and working programs, educational and methodological complexes of the educational program, reports and results of

scientific research, social-educational and social-project activities of students - future social workers, as well as diagnostic methods and questionnaires.

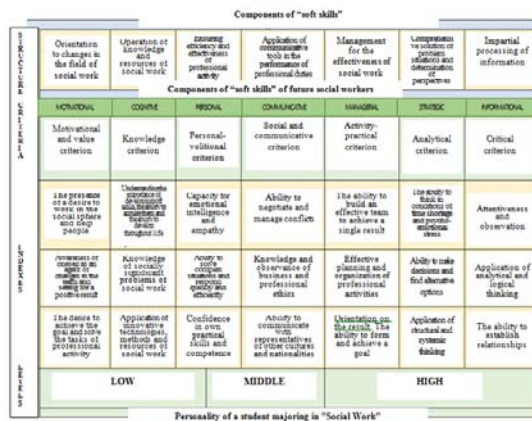


Figure 1. Structure of “soft skills”: criteria, indicators, levels of formation

3 Results

We generalize the results of the research on the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers on the basis of the following:

- Final cut and re-evaluation according to each criterion and relevant indicators to determine the level of formation of “soft skills” of future social workers in the experimental and control groups;
- Comparative analysis of the obtained data in the experimental and control groups at the ascertainment stage and after the completion of the formative stage;
- Identification of positive dynamics of quantitative indicators of the levels of formation of “soft skills” of future social workers;
- Use of mathematical statistics methods (Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion; content analysis method) to confirm the reliability of results and the effectiveness of experimental research work.

The expected result of the final assessment for each criterion and their indicators was a positive dynamic of growth in the number of students with medium and high levels of “soft skills” formation and their decrease at a low level.

Data on the level of formation of the “soft skills” components according to the relevant criteria and their indicators in the experimental and control groups of students-future social workers are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Levels of the state of formation of “soft skills” indicators according to the defined criteria at the beginning and at the end of the experiment

The level of formation of the indicator	Initial data				Final data			
	Experimental groups		Control groups		Experimental groups		Control groups	
	132	%	128	%	132	%	128	%
MOTIVATIONAL AND VALUE CRITERION								
Levels of formation of the indicator “desire to work in the social sphere and help people”								
Low	41	31.06	38	29.69	26	19.7	35	27.
Middle	73	55.3	75	58.9	58	43.94	69	53.91
High	18	13.64	15	11.72	48	36.36	24	18.75
Levels of formation of the indicator “awareness of self as a agent of changes in the community and adjustment to a positive result”								
Low	42	31.82	43	33.59	24	18.18	40	31.25
Middle	78	59.09	76	59.38	60	45.46	71	55.47
High	12	9.09	9	7.03	48	36.36	17	13.28
Levels of formation of the indicator “desire to achieve the goal and solve the tasks of professional activity”								
Low	47	35.61	49	38.28	27	20.46	41	32.03
Middle	69	52.27	66	51.56	49	37.12	59	46.09
High	16	12.12	13	10.16	56	42.42	28	21.88
Knowledge criterion								
Low	43	32.57	42	32.82	28	21.21	38	29.68

Middle	71	5379	71	5546	55	4167	62	4844
High	18	1364	15	1172	49	3712	28	2188
Levels of formation of the indicator "knowledge of socially significant problems of social work"								
Low	45	3409	42	3282	33	25	38	2968
Middle	73	5531	75	5859	58	4394	67	5234
High	14	106	11	859	41	3106	23	1798
Levels of formation of the indicator "application of innovative technologies, methods and resources of social work"								
Low	48	3636	48	375	34	2576	41	3208
Middle	73	5531	70	5469	57	4318	63	4922
High	11	833	10	781	41	3106	24	1875
PERSONAL-VOLITIONAL CRITERION								
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to emotional intelligence and empathy"								
Low	44	3334	37	2891	25	1894	30	2344
Middle	69	5227	75	5859	52	3939	67	5234
High	19	1439	16	125	55	4167	31	2422
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to solve complex situations and quick response and efficiency"								
Low	46	3485	39	3046	23	1742	34	2656
Middle	73	5531	76	5938	54	4091	65	5078
High	13	985	13	1016	55	4167	29	2266
Levels of formation of the indicator "confidence in one's own practical skills and competence"								
Low	48	3636	41	3208	26	197	34	2656
Middle	68	5152	74	5781	48	3636	65	5078
High	16	1212	13	1016	58	4394	29	2266
SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATIVE CRITERION								
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to negotiate and manage conflicts"								
Low	45	3409	39	3046	22	1667	30	2344
Middle	67	5076	70	5469	47	356	61	4766
High	20	1515	19	1485	63	4773	37	289
Levels of formation of the indicator "knowledge and observance of business and professional ethics"								
Low	39	2955	41	3208	23	1742	35	2734
Middle	69	5227	70	5469	51	3864	61	4766
High	24	1818	17	1328	58	4394	32	250
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities"								
Low	38	2879	49	3828	24	1818	41	3208
Middle	72	5455	67	5234	57	4318	61	4766
High	22	1666	12	938	51	3864	26	2031
ACTIVITY-PRACTICAL CRITERION								
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to build an effective team to achieve a single result"								
Low	43	3258	43	3359	27	2046	38	2968
Middle	68	4773	72	5625	49	3712	63	4922
High	26	1969	13	1016	56	4242	27	211
Levels of formation of the indicator "effective planning and organization of professional activity"								
Low	42	3182	42	3282	28	2121	39	3047
Middle	76	5757	72	5625	59	447	68	5312
High	14	1061	14	1093	45	3409	21	1641
Levels of formation of the indicator "orientation on the result; the ability to form and achieve a goal"								
Low	47	3561	47	3673	29	2197	40	3125
Middle	70	5303	71	5546	56	4242	63	4922
High	15	1136	10	781	47	3561	25	1953
ANALYTICAL CRITERION								
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to think in conditions of time shortage and psycho-emotional stress"								
Low	37	2808	46	3594	27	2045	42	3281
Middle	78	5909	67	5234	58	4394	59	4609
High	17	1288	15	1172	47	3561	27	211
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to make decisions and find alternative options"								
Low	46	3485	40	3125	25	1894	36	2813
Middle	74	5606	75	5859	48	3636	67	5234
High	12	909	13	1016	59	447	25	1953
Levels of formation of the indicator "application of structural and systemic thinking"								
Low	43	3258	46	3594	30	2273	42	3281
Middle	61	4621	73	5703	49	3712	67	5234
High	28	2121	9	703	53	4015	19	1485
CRITICAL CRITERION								
Levels of formation of the "attentiveness and observation" indicator								
Low	39	2955	48	375	27	2045	42	3281
Middle	71	5379	64	500	54	4091	55	4297
High	22	1666	16	125	51	3864	31	2422
Levels of formation of the "application of analytical and logical thinking" indicator								
Low	41	3106	46	3594	31	2349	41	3208
Middle	75	5682	69	539	61	4621	62	4844
High	16	1212	13	1016	40	313	25	1953
Levels of formation of the indicator "ability to establish relationships"								
Low	43	3258	40	3125	30	2273	34	2656
Middle	68	5152	73	5703	57	4318	67	5234
High	21	159	15	1172	45	3409	27	211

By comparing the obtained data of the experimental and control groups at the beginning and at the end of the experiment, we determine the dynamics of each criterion according to specific

indicators. To compare the two empirical distributions and determine the dependence of the level of formation of the specified indicators and the corresponding criteria on the implementation of the organizational and pedagogical conditions mentioned above, we calculate the λ - Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion, the obtained data are shown in Table 2. The criterion allows finding the point at which the sum of the accumulated differences between two distributions is the largest, and evaluating the reliability of this discrepancy. Under the condition that $\lambda_{emp} > \lambda_{kr}(1.36)$, it is possible to assert the effectiveness of the implementation of organizational and pedagogical conditions.

Table 2: Determination of the statistical criterion of consistency according to "soft skills" indicators

Criteria	Indicators	Value (λ_{emp})
motivational and value	"presence of the desire to work in the social sphere and help people"	1.37
	"awareness of oneself as an agent of change in the community and attitude to a positive result"	1.85
	"the effort to achieve the goal and solve the tasks of professional activity"	1.61
knowledge	"understanding the importance of developing soft skills, the ability to acquire them and the ability to develop throughout life"	1.21
	"knowledge of socially significant problems of social work"	1.05
personal-volitional	"application of innovative technologies, methods and resources of social work"	0.97
	"ability to emotional intelligence and empathy"	1.45
	"ability to solve complex situations, quick response and efficiency"	1.53
social and communicative	"confidence in own practical skills and competence"	1.7
	"ability to negotiate and manage conflicts"	1.53
	"knowledge and observance of business and professional ethics"	1.53
activity-practical	"ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities"	1.53
	"ability to build an effective team to achieve a single result"	1.69
	"effective planning and organization of professional activities"	1.45
analytical	"orientation on the result; ability to form and achieve a goal"	1.29
	"ability to think in conditions of time shortage and psycho-emotional stress"	1.21
	"ability to make decisions and find alternative options"	2.02
critica 1	"application of structural and systemic thinking"	2.02
	"attentiveness and observation"	1.21
	"application of analytical and logical thinking"	0.8
	"ability to establish relationships"	1.05

The obtained data indicate significant changes in the experimental sample according to the specified indicators. We also draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the implementation of organizational and pedagogical conditions in the case of the formation of soft skills in future social workers according to the following indicators: the presence of a desire to work in the social sphere and help people, awareness of oneself as an agent of change in the community and attitude to a positive result, the desire to achieve the goal and solve the tasks of professional activity, the ability for emotional intelligence and empathy, the ability to solve complex situations and ability of quick response and efficiency, confidence in own practical skills and competence, the ability to negotiate and manage conflicts, knowledge and compliance with business and professional ethics, the ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities, the ability to build an effective team to achieve a single result, effective planning and organization of professional activities, the ability to make decisions and find alternative options, the use of structural and systemic thinking.

The obtained numerical values indicate that the application of organizational and pedagogical conditions significantly affects the positive dynamics of the development of such indicators as the understanding of the importance of developing "soft skills", the ability to acquire them and the ability to develop throughout

life; knowledge of socially significant problems of social work; application of innovative technologies, methods and resources of social work; result orientation; the ability to form and achieve a goal; the ability to think in conditions of time shortage and psycho-emotional stress; attentiveness and observation; application of analytical and logical thinking; the ability to establish relationships. However, they are not the main factors in their development.

4 Discussion

Аналіз змісту наукових досліджень [1; 3; 8; 30; 38] щодо педагогічних умов формування “м'яких навичок” майбутніх соціальних працівників дозволяє зробити висновки щодо оригінальності отриманих нами результатів стосовно даних інших дослідників.

Our research confirms the effectiveness of the implementation of organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of soft skills of future social workers in the context of professional training, taking into account the seven-component structure of “soft skills”. The results of experiment indicate that the experimental group (EG) has a higher level of formation of “soft skills” compared to the control group (CG). Evidence of this is the transition from low and medium levels of their formation to a high level, which is a reflection of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the formation of soft skills of future social workers in the conditions of a higher education institution. There is a noticeable increase in the number of students-social workers with a high level of formation of motivational-value, personal-optional, and social-communicative criteria by all indicators.

Quantitative and qualitative processing of the results made it possible to reveal a more or less pronounced development of “soft skills” indicators. We confirmed the statistical probability of different levels of formation of “soft skills” relative to the experimental and control groups according to the indicated structure of “soft skills” using λ - the Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion. This allows assuming that the implementation of organizational and pedagogical conditions is effective and efficient to ensure the effectiveness of the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers, and, therefore, they can be comprehensively recommended in the training of social workers.

The process of formation of “soft skills” of future social workers was studied in the conditions of professional training. This fact confirms that namely professional training mainly allows students to form an integral personal formation – “soft skills” of social workers.

The practical significance of the obtained research results lies in the introduction of organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of soft skills of future social workers in the conditions of professional training into the educational process of higher education institutions of Ukraine, which will contribute to the optimization of the quality of training of future social workers.

Research materials can also be used by social workers and social pedagogues, psychologists, employees of local self-government bodies, persons responsible for the development and implementation of educational and training programs aimed at optimizing the formation of “soft skills” in children and youth.

The prospect of further research remains the search for innovative methods and tools for the formation of “soft skills” of social worker students, the determination of effective directions for the implementation of soft skills development policy as a priority way of improving higher education institutions.

5 Conclusions

Thus, the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers should be considered as a complex, multi-stage, specially organized process of high-quality professional training of social worker students.

The basis of the formation of soft skills is the orientation of a person to the implementation of changes in the field of social work, the use of knowledge and resources in solving social problems, ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of professional activity, the use of communicative tools in the performance of professional duties, management for the effectiveness of social work, comprehensive solution of problem situations and determination of perspective, as well as objective processing of information.

Effective formation of “soft skills” of future social workers in the conditions of their professional training in higher education institutions is possible on the basis of well-founded scientific, theoretical, and organizational-methodical principles, provided the necessary conditions are met.

The organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of “soft skills” are a set of factors of the educational environment, which ensure the professional training of students and the possibility of effective implementation of the relevant blocks of the structural and functional model of the formation of “soft skills” in future social workers. These include: deepening the knowledge of future social workers about “soft skills” as professionally important skills; organization of an informal environment for the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers; application of means, forms, and methods of non-formal education in order to increase the effectiveness of the formation of “soft skills” in conditions of higher education institutions.

Specifying the organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of “soft skills” of social workers, we single out the following:

- Meaningful filling of the educational discipline “Soft skills formation technologies in professional education” and introduction to the educational and professional program in the specialty “Social work” with the aim of students acquiring knowledge of “soft skills” and means, forms and methods of their formation and development;
- Creation of a website for students with the necessary materials for determining the level of formation of “soft skills”, their formation and improvement;
- The use of effective means, forms and methods of professional training of social workers in order to increase the level of formation of “soft skills” of students in the conditions of classroom and out-of-classroom activities.

An experimental study of the organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of “soft skills” of future social workers showed the effectiveness of the implementation of these conditions as part of professional training in the institutions of higher education, taking into account the seven-component structure of “soft skills”.

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Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AM