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**FORMATION OF THE BACHELORS' SOFT SKILLS WHILE  
STUDYING FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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***Abstract***

The article describes the author's experience of the formation of the bachelors' soft skills even if the students do not major in languages realized on the basis of the Language School functioning in Ershov Ishim Teachers' Training Institute (branch) of Tyumen State University. The authors prove that the soft skills formation is an effective means of high-quality training of the graduates of colleges of education. Along with soft skills the metacompetences are actualized and they are favorable conditions of entry into profession. The new professional environment is considered by the graduates to be a platform for integration of the acquired knowledge, development of skills of analytical, critical and creative thinking, a way of self-actualization in action. In general the authors come to the conclusion that the created foreign language environment allows to diversify the possibilities of each student in the resource environment of college of education for successful integration at the following levels: key terms and concepts; ideas, principles, logical, associative and cross-disciplinary links; problematization and generalization of the components entering the interdisciplinary modeling.

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**Keywords:** Soft skills, language environment, assessment of the formation of soft skills.



## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays the employers take an active part in defining the reference points on the determination of the Skills Profiles. Colleges of education, being guided by the needs of the labor market, form the list of the Skills Profiles, define the disciplines in the curricula. Ershov Ishim Teachers' Training Institute (branch) of Tyumen State University provides training for specialists in 3 disciplines: 44.03.05 Pedagogical education (with two Skills Profiles); 44.03.01 Pedagogical education; 44.03.02 Psychological and pedagogical education (more than 20 Skills Profiles and 1000 students). Among the realized profiles, there are such ones that are not connected with language studying for which the Federal State Educational Standard of higher education assumes the formation of the common cultural competence: OC-4 - the ability to communicate orally and in writing in Russian and foreign languages for the solution of problems of interpersonal and cross-cultural interaction. The level of the formation of the students' soft skills in the process of studying languages means the students' successful socialization. In 2018 the Federal State Educational Standard of higher education 3 ++ was adopted where we find the universal competence: UC – 4 - the ability to realize business communication in orally and in writing in the state language of the Russian Federation and foreign languages' (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 2018). The new Standard demands new decisions and we will try to describe them in the given article.

## **2. Problem Statement**

English is a language of education, science, politics and business, possession of which is a key ability in the modern world. Knowledge of English can help to achieve the goals in education, to open the new horizons and to make oneself a career in the chosen sphere.

## **3. Research Questions**

The highly qualified specialists having mega-competences (soft skills) in language area feel the stability in labor market. It explains the fact that the higher education institutions are in constant search of productive forms of the organization of the educational environment, trying to answer the following question: What are the elements of effective functioning of the system of the formation of the students' soft skills in the conditions of the resource base of colleges of education.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Research objective: identification and description of the effective forms of the organization for the effective soft skills formation of the students not majoring in languages in the Language School.

## **5. Research Methods**

The described research was conducted in the Language School of Ershov Ishim Teachers' Training Institute (branch) of Tyumen State University. 300 bachelors who don't major in languages participated in the research. For the solution of the research problems the following methods were chosen: observation, conversation, questionnaire, analysis of documents, pilot study, methods of mathematical statistics.

Relying on the domestic and foreign literature (Goleman, 1995; Bepalov; 2012; Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Kristin, 2015) we can make a conclusion that the criteria for evaluation of the level of formation of communicative competence while training students not majoring in foreign languages are: compliance of the speech to the standards of modern literary English; possession of the vocabulary; semantic integrity, speech connectedness, use of nonverbal means of communication in interpersonal interaction; achievement of communicative goals; tolerance to the participants of communication, etc.

The chosen criteria makes it possible to define the indicators necessary for evaluation of the level of soft skills formation of the students not majoring in foreign languages but studying languages in the Language School. They are presented in Table 1.

**Table 01.** Criteria and indicators

Criteria	Indicators
Compliance of the speech to the standards of modern literary English	Students don't make mistakes in the text more than 200 words, make one speech mistake in the text more than 200 words, make two, three or more speech mistakes in the text more than 500 words in interpersonal communication.
Possession of the vocabulary	Students possess copious vocabulary, possess restricted vocabulary, possess poor vocabulary in interpersonal communication.
Semantic integrity, speech connectedness, use of nonverbal means of communication in interpersonal interaction	Speech is characterized by semantic integrity, there are not considerable violations of speech connectedness; speech is characterized by lack of semantic integrity and speech connectedness in interpersonal communication; various nonverbal means of communication are used to advantage; nonverbal means of communication aren't used to advantage.
Achievement of communicative goals	Students can set communicative goals and try to achieve them; they can set communicative goals, but not always tries to achieve them.
Tolerance to the participants of communication	The most tolerant attitude towards the opinions, judgments, remarks of the participants of communication; rather tolerant relation, intolerant relation.

The integrative character of the criteria and indicators aimed at studying the level of formation of the communicative competence in interpersonal interaction while training students not majoring in foreign languages we adapted the technique of diagnostics of motivational orientations in interpersonal communications (Kungurova, 2009) to the educational environment of colleges of education. The cross-sectional method acted as the main method of the research.

In general the diagnostics supposed studying the main communicative orientations and their harmony in interpersonal communication while contacting formally. 20 questions were arranged into 5 groups: compliance of the speech to the standards of modern literary English; possession of the vocabulary; semantic integrity, speech connectedness, use of nonverbal means of communication in interpersonal interaction; achievement of communicative goals; tolerance to the participants of communication.

The key setting during the work with the adapted technique was the respondents' individual experience of communication with partners in business communication at practical lessons.

The general total indicator in each group showed the harmony of communicative orientation and was equal to 84 points that made 100% of adequacy for the meta-competences formation of the students not majoring in foreign languages. In general the level of soft skills formation was defined as high, average and low.

## 6. Findings

By the results of the survey conducted in September, 2015 we managed to establish that 47% respondents from 300 consider the meta-competences (soft skills) to be the necessary condition of the successful adaptation and socialization in the international environment existence. The respondents estimated the following skills which can be included in the job description of a modern teacher: communication skills, self-management skills, effective thinking skills, management skills. The questioning in 2018 shows that the number of respondents interested in the soft skills formation has increased and reached 87%.

The authors on the base of the presented diagnostic bases defines the students' formation of soft skills as constructive assistance in the communicative field where we find the co-being identification of the internal potential of non-language Skills Profiles. This identification has a developing function: co-being includes development and develops personal communicative potential. 'Co-knowledge, co-empathy and co-activity are a tripartite cooperative form of such interaction' (Kungurova, 2010).

Co-knowledge in the communicative field is a key condition of the development of students' personal set of knowledge offering them some prospects of soft skills formation (skills of intellectual thinking). Co-empathy in the communicative field is defined by the display of respect, sympathy and responsiveness in interpersonal relations and includes understanding of the person's inner world and behavior with whom the communicative contact is made by means of intuitive penetration into his experiences, empathy, recognitions of the value of human culture and we consider it to be self-management skills. As Bespalov (2012) considers, the person's professionalism 'is implemented more actively, if a person comprehends the value of culture and organizes his own forces. The person's participation in cultural development ... is a major criterion of familiarizing of the personality with the world of spiritual and professional richness of society, an indicator of individual development ...'. Co-activity in the communicative field is provided in joint creativity, organization of dialogue in communication, existence of the relations, an active position of the participants of the creative search. Skills of communicative literacy are formed alongside.

The educational environment of colleges of education is oriented on the constructive assistance in the communicative field where the bachelors' aspiration to develop, get new experience, grow professionally are actualized; the ideas of the purposes of self-development and the concrete development plans are formed; students begin to try not only what they understand and know well, but also something new, take risks; begin to analyze their own actions and results, look for the reasons of progress and failures in their actions, but not in external circumstances; seek to receive the feedback about the success of the actions from their group mates, tutors, employers and so on.

The main rules of the presented determinants are:

Co-knowledge in the communicative field - training and development - a continuous process: continuous receiving of new experience, acquaintance to new professionals, completing more difficult tasks, use of new tools in one's life; study of environmental processes, new trends, achievements in priority areas of interests; regular reading of literature and information resources in the selected area.

Co-empathy in the communicative field - work with the people a person wishes to study with and follow to (both in personal and professional plans); the ability to use the feedback effectively (response of others to your actions or inactivity) and to determine its value.

Co-activity in the communicative field - effective planning of the development; an integrated approach to your own development: use of different formats of development and training; step-by-step development of those directions which will help to achieve success in study or work; development of personal and professional skills through completing new tasks and projects; use of the opportunities of the alternative education: visits of useful and interesting actions (master classes, trainings, seminars).

The results show that the essence of the individual educational paths in teaching students not majoring in languages to foreign languages in the Language School greatly contribute to soft skills formation and it is reflected by the following indicators: 80% - the students show compliance of the speech to the standards of modern literary English, they don't make mistakes in the texts more than 200 words; 35% - the students show poor vocabulary in interpersonal communication; 15% - the students show semantic integrity, speech connectedness, use of nonverbal means of communication; 50% of the respondents can set communicative goals and then achieve them.

Thanks to group and individual forms of work at practical lessons in the Language School 75% of respondents show the high level of tolerance to the opinions, judgments, remarks of the participants of interpersonal communication, the ability to modulate emotions, to plan and control the activity in verbal and nonverbal communication.

The results prove that pedagogical education has all the possibilities of immersion in language environment, but as practice shows not all the technologies provide the quality of the graduates' training. We will describe the effective system of the formation of the students' soft skills while studying foreign languages in the Language School which solves the following problems: the creation of the favorable English-speaking environment, the development of educational programs of various level of complexity and thematic orientation, the organization and correction of the process of studying English, the development and edition of educational and methodical literature for effective creation of the information field. The system of the formation of the students' soft skills demands the integration of the potential of foreign languages in conjunction with informal education and extra-curricular educational work.

There is a great number of opportunities: from introducing into the educational process of trainings and seminars on soft skills formation (communicative trainings, presentations, etc.) to full reorganization of the educational process in which the system of project, problem training or the elements of informal education begin to dominate. We will describe how these elements were realized while teaching bachelors not majoring in languages to English in the Language School.

Tutoring assumed professional masters, colleagues, teachers (tutors) and pupils who interacting with each other, imparted and gained knowledge and formed a certain language experience, developing basic

communicative skills, self-management skills, effective thinking skills and management skills. Each of the skills is briefly described in the following Table.

**Table 02.** Soft skills in English teaching and learning

Communication skills	Students are expected to be fluent and able to communicate effectively in English. They should be able to convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms. They are also expected to be active listeners while providing the necessary response. They should be capable of giving and using technology during presentations confidently.
Self-management skills	In acquiring skills and knowledge, students should be able to do self-regulated learning independently. They must be autonomous learners. They should have the skills to search for relevant information from various sources and able to manage them efficiently. They should also be receptive to new ideas and able to develop an inquiry mind and have the ability to use the information technology wisely.
Effective thinking skills	With this skill, students should be able to think in a critical, creative, innovative, and analytical manner which includes the ability to apply knowledge. Elements that students must possess under this aspect are the ability to identify and analyze complex situation as well as making evaluations that are justifiable. They should have the ability to expand and improve thinking skills, to provide ideas, and alternative solutions.
Management skills	Skill entails the ability to lead in various activities. Students should have the knowledge on basic leadership theories which will enable them to lead a project. It is also essential that they are able to understand the role of a leader and a group member and be able to carry out those roles interchangeably.

So, all the students were divided into three groups and scrubbed to five tutors (three English teachers and two psychologists) that gave the chance to organize the work of the audience with different levels of knowledge and abilities so that each student could improve his academic achievements. It allowed to raise the degree of the students' involvement into collaboration, stimulated their motivation to achievement of the educational goals, and as for group support and assessment – the students' social motivation.

Mentoring as a form of soft skills formation was closely connected with individual coaching. We can explain its relevance by the increasing student's needs to have a tutor, a curator, a consultant who could develop together with the student the individual development plan (IDP), directed to the realization of the human potential and development of personal opportunities - an individual way of professional formation, a program of the priority goals of development, steps and actions necessary for their achievement. The planning algorithm can be defined by the following important questions:

- a) in what way to develop - the goals (for this purpose it is necessary to analyse all the barriers on the way to the vital or professional goals, to request the feedback from authoritative and reference people);
- b) what to develop - competences/skills (the choice of soft skills, necessary for the achievement of the goals);
- c) how to develop - instruments of development (selection of suitable instruments of development);
- d) with whom to develop – search of the reference person who can give constructive feedback later, confirm soft skills formation and help with the choice of the necessary actions.

Here is a fragment of the IDP (Table 3).

**Table 03.** Individual development plan (IDP)

<b>Goals</b>		
What do you aim at in your profession (1-3 years)? Think over the tasks you would like to solve during the year?		
1		
2		
3		
<b>Individual Development Plan for soft skills</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Competence/ Skill / Development area:</b> - reference people's recommendations - assessment results - your own decisions	
<b>Development goal / Expected result:</b> What will be the result of the development?		
<b>Developing actions</b>	<b>Support of others</b>	<b>Term</b>
Actions for development, special projects, trainings, seminars, self-education (the recommended number of actions 3-5)	Whose support is necessary for you?	When do you plan to finish the action?
<b>2</b>	<b>Competence/ Skill / Development area:</b> - reference people's recommendations - assessment results - your own decisions	
<b>Development goal / Expected result:</b> What will be the result of the development?		
<b>Developing actions</b>	<b>Support of others</b>	<b>Term</b>
Actions for development, special projects, trainings, seminars, self-education (the recommended number of actions 3-5)	Whose support is necessary for you?	When do you plan to finish the action?

The described system supposed the following steps:

- Step 1. To estimate your own level of soft skills formation.
- Step 2. To plan the way of personal development and decide what role it plays in your life –to develop the IDP.
- Step 3. To draw up a programme.

Teaching to foreign languages and soft skills formation supposed not only individual work with students, but also training in groups, for example, by means of team building. In fact, it represented the tasks directed to creation from a group of students a real team – a community with the same goals and values. The games contributed greatly to the development of the participants' feeling of unity, helped the students to understand their role in the team, the influence of their behavior on the condition of the whole group, community; formed the experience of direct interaction with other people, trust to the participants. Before modeling and performing tasks, it is very important to consider the group readiness for the game

and realization of this or that complexity of the tasks. The work by means of team-building looked as follows. For example, the exercise 'I'm singing and laughing'. All the participants form a circle. The leader with a kerchief in hands is in the center. He throws the kerchief up. While it is in the air everybody sings in English, when it is on the earth all keeps silent for 20 seconds (all are to be serious). If someone bursts out laughing or smiles, the exercise begins again.

Teaching by action learning we can show on the example of the game 'Ice-breakers'. Students are to perform short active tasks that last about 5 minutes. Such a game allows to destress, to increase focusing; usually it doesn't demand any special preparations and thematic materials. Thanks to it students study through specially organized situations, solving problem and creative tasks, obtaining the corresponding knowledge, group and training work. In the work we are usually guided by the following: training through making, solving communicative situations, group work, formalization of the results (presentations, materials).

Storytelling is an effective way of transferring of the certain information aimed at the personal development. Myths, legends, fairy tales, fascinating and instructive stories from the life of the heroes significant for this or that group belong to such kind of information. Every person in his life can find himself in the choice situation when it is necessary to make a crucial decision, a short story told or read by someone, a fairy tale, a popular quotation, a metaphor can help to solve the problem. We can explain the efficiency of storytelling by the fact that it helps to answer the vital questions. We used ready, well-known metaphors though today many authors compose new philosophical parables, modern fairy tales, short stories which are published in the Internet, etc. The work at the practical lessons, as a rule, included three stages:

Stage 1 - setting of communicative tasks, emotional attitudes, stimulating the development of interest (for example, If you want to know..., If you are interested in how...) can be created with the help of both verbal and nonverbal means (illustrations, a sack with different objects, etc.);

Stage 2 - reading (students read or listen to the texts with full understanding of the main contents, with full understanding or with selective information acquisition), a story-teller can stop and ask the listeners to surmise what will happen to the heroes further, or ask them how they would feel if they were the heroes in this or that situation;

Stage 3 - control of understanding of the text (test tasks, tasks to create a monologue with the expression of the attitude, feelings and emotions, assessment of the heroes' deeds, etc.)

Play-back theater is a modification of storytelling. It gave us the chance by means of performing (students performed themselves) to make vivid certain situations which happened long ago or have just happened. The purpose of the play-back theater is to influence on the audience by means of reflection. At the same time, the advantage is also that it allows to model a situation in short terms, slightly changing one or several components of the situation performed on stage.

Role-playing is playing by the participants of the created in advance script connected with the educational area. It expanded the students' views, changed the relation to the studied subject, demonstrated behavior consequences in this or that set situation, modeled the crisis situations in safe conditions. It was important that the participants' behavior wasn't limited to tough rules, but was defined by understanding of the role.

Shadowing (Job Shadowing – 'following as a shadow') was also very effective especially in development and training. Its essence was connected with the fact that students during certain time while

doing something was always near a skilled person, followed him as 'shadow' everywhere. As we have already mentioned all the students were divided into three groups and scrubbed to five tutors (three English teachers and two psychologists), so the students could choose the person they trusted more.

Secondment supposed moving of the leader of one educational group to another, differing in the subjects, the direction of practical activities, the project ideas, etc. According to the method, groups members were constantly changing, leaders passed into other groups.

We organized games, different tasks with competitive elements purposefully to draw the participants' attention to this or that problem, subject, etc. We organized them for the participants' acquaintance with any event, program, project, the creation of conditions for the group cooperation.

Simulations were connected with the reproduction of real life situations. We organized them to stimulate the participants to search of optimal ways out of difficult situations similar with reality in very short time periods. At the same time participants acted, reacting to the events independently, without programming roles and schemes of actions. Such tasks are always as close as possible to reality therefore they demand thorough preparations. As simulations are connected with difficult situations, they always demand identification of the group members who need the support.

We used brainstorming for the solution of problem situations. It supposed group search of the idea. As a rule, the ideas were fixed without any assessment in short periods of time, and then were discussed by all the participants. Brainstorming not only stirred up the group activity, but also created the conditions for the development of creative thinking, development of non-standard decisions.

As we see in the given article, the majority of ways of organization of informal education can be characterized by orientation on equal partnership that becomes more effective when forming relations of co-being, cooperation and co-creativity.

In conclusion we'd like to stop on the choice of this or that way of informal education. They are: situational relevance of the chosen game/task and its compliance to the subject of the educational practice or route; readiness of the group to perform game actions; the level of the formation of the community; record of age, gender, social and other distinctions; number of participants in the group; possibility of improvisation in game space. Room for mistakes was one of the most important conditions that helped to model and support the participants' trust. Modeling real life situations, supporting on your own mistakes the participants managed to form their personal experience and plan the way of the future education and development.

Forming soft skills can be integrated in learning activities either. Teachers and tutors must be able to formulate appropriate learning activities because learning activities may give students greater chance to form their soft skills. Learning activities, according to European Community (2006), are understood as 'any activities of an individual organized with the intention to improve his/her knowledge, skills and competence'. There are two fundamental criteria to distinguish learning activities from non-learning ones and they are: the activity must be intentional, so the act has a predetermined purpose and the activity is organized in some way, including being organized by the learner himself/herself; it typically involves the transfer of information in a broader sense (messages, ideas, knowledge, strategies). Below we'll give the summary of the learning activities teachers may bring into their classroom to form the students' soft skills.

**Table 04.** Soft Skills and Learning Activities or Strategies

<b>Soft Skills</b>	<b>Learning Activities</b>
Communication skills	Oral quizzes (listening and verbal); presentations (verbal, written, diagrammatic); role playing; modeling use of language in classroom; debates; comparison of literature work, websites, etc.; peer assessment; etc
Self-management skills	Requiring email submissions of homework; designing presentations; having communication with teachers through email, Facebook, or VK
Effective thinking	Comparing solutions for a problem and providing new alternatives; interpreting diagrams, graphs, statistical illustration, maps, etc.; generating questions that go beyond simple recall to higher order of thinking; relating new understanding to other concepts; giving students sample problems with missing information; giving variety of testing techniques
Management skills	Giving students rubric; giving students checklists, subtitles, graphic organizers, mind maps, etc.; teaching students how to highlight important information, take meaningful notes; logging learning goals, new ideas and skills, additional home study to prepare for next class; allowing hand-written 'cheat sheets'; being consistent in applying deadlines

Extracurricular social activities were a powerful resource as well. It was connected with the practice of volunteership and self-government. As a rule, these initiatives for students are one of the best forms of investments into their development: associations of people relying on the personal resources and team work are a very effective training of soft skills.

One of the most important components of the achievement of career and academic heights is the existence of skills which are responsible for productive participation in working process and provide high efficiency. We distinguished the following groups of soft skills: communicative skills, self-management skills, effective thinking skills and management skills. Such skills don't depend on a certain field of activity, so the courses aimed at their formation can suit any student. In the Language School we provided the following courses:

- Career building skills in English;
- Applying for a graduate study;
- Interpersonal communication;
- Business communication;
- Formal and informal leadership;
- Self-management and team-management;
- Time-management and career-management;
- Tolerance in team projecting;
- Business communication: self-presentation of team victories.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, in the conditions of globalization students are forced to develop soft skills as possession of them in many respects defines success of future professional activity of students, helps to be implemented successfully in quickly changing world. The higher education institution needs to find only such means to help them with this process.

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