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ORCID ID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0371-5058>

*Anna Boiko,
PhD in Pedagogy,
Institute of Problems on Education of the NAES of Ukraine,
Kyiv*

INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: DEFINITION OF SOFT SKILLS

***Abstract.** The article is devoted to the urgent issue of the formation of students' soft skills in the process of innovative development of non-formal education that enables them to become successful in the future. The aim of the article is to define the term "soft skills" in the context of innovative development of non-formal education in Ukraine based on the analysis of current national and international studies and normative documents.*

To implement the research objectives, the following theoretical methods were used such as content-analysis and generalization of scientific research in order to determine the main approaches of defining the key notions of students' soft skills in institutions of out-of-school education, systematization and comparison of theoretical data in order to identify the main components of students' soft skills in non-formal education.

According to the results of the research, the notion of "soft skills" is defined as a set of intangible personal qualities, traits, attributes, habits and attitudes that can be used in many different types of jobs. The students' soft skills include creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision making, learning to learn, metacognition, communication, collaboration, citizenship (local and global), life and career skills, personal and social responsibility (including cultural awareness and competence), etc.

It is found that non-formal education should emphasize developing students' soft skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, conflict resolution, and communication skills, which can be used across a range of occupational fields.

It is concluded that innovations in non-formal education need to focus efforts on access, inclusion, and sustainability in the provision, such as: ensuring soft skills learning, developing educational programs for students in providing relevant soft skills, training well-qualified educators for developing students' soft skills in institutions of out-of-school education.

The practical significance of the research is that its materials can be used to develop educational programs for out-of-school education, in the system of professional teacher training and pedagogical practice of students.,

The results obtained provide a basis for future research that should be dedicated to the development of educational programs for the formation of students' soft skills in institutions of out-of-school education.

***Key words:** soft skills, hard skills, non-formal education, institutions of out-of-school education, innovative development, New Ukrainian School.*

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Introduction. Nowadays, the educational system has faced challenges and opportunities, including new technologies, changing labour markets, migration, conflict, and environmental and political changes. To achieve success within the current and future environment, it is necessary for growing personality to access quality education and learning that develops skills, knowledge,

attitudes and values and enables them to become successful lifelong learners who can find productive work, learn, and relearn, actively engage in their communities, make wise decisions.

Moreover, a global pandemic has greatly impacted all aspects of our everyday lives. Students will have to adapt and learn to live in a different way. Accordingly, teaching and learning have also been greatly impacted.

Nevertheless, today's educational system mostly has focused on the acquisition of knowledge that is not sufficient to prepare students to meet challenges and seize opportunities now and in the future. Therefore, there is an urgent need to transform the education system in Ukraine, especially non-formal learning to provide the younger generation with quality learning opportunities that include the skills they need to succeed in life.

The basic ideas and the significance of soft skills in assuring the long-term success of children and youth are emphasized by the national normative-legal acts such as the Law of Ukraine "On Out-of-School Education" [1], the Concept of "The New Ukrainian School: Conceptual principles of secondary school reform" [4], as well as international documents – USAID Education Policy "Social and Emotional Learning and Soft Skills" [6], the report of UNESCO "Skills for a connected world" [21], the report of UNICEF "The Global Framework on Transferable Skills" [23], Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Education 2030" [13].

Aim and tasks. The aim of the article is to define the term of "soft skills" in the context of innovative development of non-formal education in Ukraine based on the analysis of current national and international studies and normative documents.

Research methods. To implement the research objectives, the following theoretical methods were used such as: content-analysis and generalization of scientific research in order to determine the main approaches of defining the key notions of students' soft skills in institutions of out-of-school education, systematization and comparison of theoretical data in order to identify the main components of students' soft skills in non-formal education.

Research results. The development of soft skills among children and youth has been studied in many spheres such as humanitarian and social sciences, economics and business serviced. Over the past few decades, the term "soft skills" were transmitted in the field of education, psychology and pedagogy.

The notion of "soft skills" is used to indicate "a set of intangible personal qualities, traits,

attributes, habits and attitudes that can be used in many different types of jobs'. The list of soft skills is not clear at this time. For example, according to UNESCO, soft skills include empathy, leadership, sense of responsibility, integrity, self-esteem, self-management, motivation, flexibility, sociability, time management and making decisions. The term "soft skills" is also used in contrast to "hard skills" that are defined as more technical, highly specific in nature and particular to an occupation, and, in general, that can be taught more easily than soft skills [22].

The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all state important targets and indicative strategies. According to these goals, all children should have achieved an array of relevant learning outcomes as defined by and measured against established curricula and official standards, including subject knowledge and cognitive and non-cognitive skills that enable children to develop to their full potential [13].

It is noted that there is debate around the term "non-cognitive skills" and that other terms have been used including "transversal skills", "transferable skills", "21st century skills", "soft skills". In general, this document uses more common notions as non-cognitive skills or soft skills, which include:

- critical and innovative thinking;
- interpersonal skills;
- intrapersonal skills;
- global citizenship skills;
- media and information literacy [13].

As a result, there is an urgent need for students to develop throughout life the soft skills and competencies they need to live and work in a sustainable, knowledge-based and technological world. Therefore, institutions of out-of-school education should provide such educational program for pupils that help them to acquire relevant soft skills – develop their critical and creative thinking, collaborative and communicative skills, etc.

In the context of our research, the document "The Global Partnership for Education" [15] emphasizes on the structural components of development the following students' soft skills as essential life skills:

a) knowledge of global issues and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity and respect;

b) cognitive skills to think critically, systemically and creatively, including adopting a multi-perspective approach that recognizes different dimensions, perspectives and angles of issues;

c) non-cognitive skills including social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, and communicative skills and aptitudes for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives;

d) behavioural capacities to act collaboratively and responsibly, and to strive for collective good.

According to the analysis of the recent studies, the content of non-formal education must be relevant with a focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges can be acquired through education for sustainable development, which includes peace and human rights education as well as intercultural education and education for international understanding [14]. Moreover, the term “soft skills” has typically been used in the context of formal or non-formal education children and youth across all levels of the education system, as well as in workforce development programs [24]

In 2018, in the report UNESCO “Skills for a Connected World”, the types of skills needed in and for a connected economy and society, with a focus on soft skills and competencies, the strategies and ways in which these skills can be developed and assessed were examined [21].

In the previous studies of M. Binkley, O. Erstad, J. Herman, S. Raizen, M. Ripley, M. Miller-Ricci [9], the problem of the formation of twenty-first-century skills (also referred to variously as “non-cognitive” or “soft skills” have become an increasing area of focus in the international education discourse, with more and more countries across the globe. The scholars define “soft skills” as the abilities and attributes that can be taught or learned in order to enhance ways of thinking, learning, working and living in the world According to this findings, the soft skills include:

- creativity and innovation;
- critical thinking;
- problem solving;
- decision making;
- learning to learn;

- metacognition;
- communication;
- collaboration (teamwork);
- information literacy;
- ICT literacy;
- citizenship (local and global);
- life and career skills;
- personal and social responsibility (including cultural awareness and competence).

The USAID Education Policy explains “soft skills” as a “broad set of skills, behaviors, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals” [6].

On the other hand, soft skills are sometimes used as a synonym for social and emotional skills, yet depending on the program, it can refer to a wider range of skills, behaviors, or qualities this document also identifies in the structure of personality. However, the notion “social and emotional skills” skills are interpreted as a “set of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that children and youth, through explicit, active, focused, sequenced instruction that allows them to understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” [24].

The table below shows the difference between soft skills and social and emotional skills (Table 1).

Table 1

| Soft Skills | Social and Emotional Skills |
|--|---|
| Higher-order thinking skills: problem solving, critical thinking, decision-making | Self awareness: self-confidence, self-efficacy, identifying emotions |
| Self-control: delay gratification, impulse control, directing and focusing attention, managing emotions, regulating behavior | Self management: self-discipline, impulse control, stress management |
| Social skills: respecting others, using context-appropriate behavior, resolving conflict | Social awareness: empathy, respect for others, perspective taking |
| Communication skills: oral, written, and non-verbal communication | Relationship skills: communication, teamwork |
| Positive self-concept: self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and beliefs, self-esteem, well-being, and pride | Responsible decision-making: identifying problems, analyzing situations |

The problem of understanding the essence of the concept of “soft skills” is dedicated to the previous research of M. Arat [8], P. Klaus [16], P. K. Padhi [19], N. Seetha [20], L. Kurekova, M. Beblavy, C. Haita [17]. Most of the definitions of soft skills are based on the functionality of soft skills, not the description of them.

In the works of P. Klaus, two kinds of skills are distinguished – hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills are considered as the skills that people use in certain types of occupations. These skills are tangible skills that we learn in school and utilize at work. On the other hand, soft skills are intangible skills that we learn by personal development training and utilize at both work and life [16].

According to M. Gladwell [12], individuals who have better soft skills are taking the jobs, solving their problems in life in comparison to the people who have less soft skills. “Hard skills” is a new term, emerged recently in order to distinguish them from soft skills.

The scholar P. K. Padhi claims that soft skills are typically hard to observe, quantify and measure. This is due to the fact that soft skills are considered as a set of skills that includes how people relate to each other by communicating, listening, engaging in dialogue, giving feedback, cooperating as a team member, solving problems, contributing in meetings and resolving conflict. However, as the scholar notes, the education system has been not prepared modern graduates for this work environment. In particular, schools focus almost exclusively on hard skills and ignore soft skills development. Students are generally concerned to master various mathematics skills, science skills and technical skills directly related to the specific disciplines. Though this learning is essential to their success yet the fast-paced and global marketplace of today demands more competencies in soft skills [19].

The paradigm shift in the 21st century, according to Seetha N., has forced upon the importance of soft skills around the world in recent times as they are deemed to be imperative for organizational productivity. However, obtaining these skills to be taught in universities and higher institutions of learning, is not the case in reality [20].

Studying the issue of developing soft skills, L. Kurekova, M. Beblavy, C. Haita propose a taxonomy of the formation of non-cognitive skills (are often termed as “soft skills” and can combine personal characteristics and attitudes), which consists of the following factors agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, autonomy, and extraversion [17].

We agree with the findings of M. Arat [8] that contextual learning is a good way of

acquiring soft skills. Soft skills can better be learned at activities during the university years, like long-term apprenticeships, sports, voluntary works and projects, art and design projects, long-term workshops and classes, international and domestic travel and learning to play an instrument during their university education. Acquiring soft skills may require changing attitudes, which can be learned through long-time training. Consequently, institutions of non-formal education are suitable places to acquire soft skills based on students' abilities and interests.

The obtained results have shown a lack of attention to the formation of soft skills in the preparation of curricula; insufficient involvement of employers in this process; complexity observation and evaluation of soft skills; the gap between the competencies that graduates acquired during their learning and the expectations and demand for the labor market. However, the international scientific community is in solidarity that educational programs in any case need to be reoriented towards the formation of soft skills.

Discussion. This is an important finding in the understanding of the development person's soft skills based on the results of analysis of current national research [3; 5; 7; 25] and international studies [8; 9; 12; 16; 17; 19; 20] as well as normative documents [6; 13; 14; 15; 18; 21; 23; 24], which have demonstrated the main approaches in identifying the key notions. However, there has been much discussion in the discourse regarding the formation of students' soft skills and hard skills in the process of formal and non-formal education. Soft skills are expressed in the form of observable behaviors, generally in the performance of a certain action.

When comparing our results with older studies [1; 10; 11], it should be pointed out that implementation of the competence approach in out-of-school education strengthens the practical orientation relying on the main priorities of education such as the ability to quickly adapt to change and modern needs of society, skills to work with a variety of information sources, the ability to act actively, decision-making in unusual situations, lifelong learning.

From the key point of competence approach, the result of the educational process is not only in gaining the amount of knowledge but in developing skills and ability to act effectively in a variety of situations that may arise in different areas of human life, including professional. Modern studies distinguish two types of skills: hard skills and soft skills. Most researchers define "hard skills" as skills required by a specialist to perform certain professional tasks, and "soft skill" as skills that will contribute to the successful communication of future professionals and the achievement of success in the future. There is no permanent list, as well as the classification of soft

skills, but analyzing various sources, such as manifestations of leadership qualities, team skills work, the ability to teach, the ability to negotiate, resolve conflicts, the ability to put and achieve goals, manage time personal and time of subordinates, purposefulness, presentation skills, public speaking, effective communication skills, stress resistance, creativity, etc.

It is difficult to explain such results without the context of putting into practice the basic principles of the New Ukrainian School in the system of non-formal education in Ukraine, which is still at the stage of reforming. In this regard, there is a need to transform the educational process of institutions of out-of-school education, including innovative forms and methods of teaching, such as training, involvement of students in project work, taking into account the needs of students, parents, and social demands.

Conclusion. The analysis of the scientific research and normative documents leads to the following conclusions. Due to the fact that most educational programs mostly focus on work-specific skills or hard skills, it reduces graduates' abilities to adapt to the fast-changing demands of the labor market. For that reason, beyond mastering hard skills, non-formal education must emphasize developing students' high-level non-cognitive or soft skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity, conflict resolution, and communication skills, which can be used across a range of occupational fields. Moreover, learners should be provided with opportunities to update their skills continuously through lifelong learning.

New strategies and innovation of non-formal education are needed to provide soft skills. This includes revising and developing non-formal educational programs to improve students' soft skills, as well as improving the system of teacher professional development in this area.

Institutions of out-school education continue to be key sites in developing students' soft skills finding effective strategies to bridge formal and non-formal provision for lifelong learning. Therefore, innovations in non-formal education need to focus efforts on access, inclusion, and sustainability in the provision, such as: ensuring soft skills learning, developing educational programs for students in providing relevant soft skills, training well-qualified educators for developing students' soft skills in institutions of out-of-school education.

The results obtained provide a basis for future research that should be dedicated to the development of educational programs for the formation of students' soft skills in institutions of out-of-school education.

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*Анна Бойко,
кандидат педагогічних наук,
Інститут проблем виховання НАПН України,
м. Київ*

ІННОВАЦІЙНИЙ РОЗВИТОК ПОЗАШКІЛЬНОЇ ОСВІТИ В УКРАЇНІ: АНАЛІЗ ПОНЯТТЯ “SOFT SKILLS”

***Анотація.** Стаття присвячена актуальній проблемі формування у зростаючої особистості м'яких навичок (soft skills) на сучасному етапі інноваційного розвитку позашкільної освіти, оволодіння якими сприяє досягненню успіху в майбутньому.*

Метою статті є визначення поняття “soft skills” у контексті інноваційного розвитку позашкільної освіти в Україні на основі аналізу сучасних вітчизняних та міжнародних досліджень та нормативних документів.

Для реалізації завдань дослідження були використані такі теоретичні методи, як контент-аналіз та узагальнення наукових досліджень з метою визначення основних підходів до визначення ключових понять м'яких навичок учнів у закладах позашкільної освіти, систематизації та порівняння теоретичних даних з метою виявлення основних компонентів soft skills дітей та молоді у позашкільній освіті.

Визначено сутність поняття “soft skills” як сукупність особистісних якостей, рис, властивостей, звичок і установок, які можна використовувати у багатьох різних видах діяльності, що включають творчість та інновації, критичне мислення, уміння вирішувати проблеми, приймати рішення, навчання вчитися, навички комунікації та співпраці, особистісна та соціальну відповідальність (включаючи культурну обізнаність та компетентність) та ін.

Зроблено висновок про те, що інновації в сучасній позашкільній освіті мають зосередитися забезпечення м'яких навичок шляхом розробки навчальних програм для учнів у закладах позашкільної освіти за різними напрямками та профілями, а також через систему підвищення кваліфікації педагогічних працівників з формування м'яких навичок учнів у закладах позашкільної освіти.

Практична значущість дослідження полягає в тому, що його матеріали можуть бути використані для розробки навчальних програм позашкільної освіти, в системі професійної підготовки та перепідготовки педагогічних працівників, у педагогічній практиці студентів закладів вищої освіти тощо.

Отримані результати створюють основу для подальших наукових досліджень, які мають бути присвячені розробці ефективних технологій формування м'яких навичок учнів у закладах позашкільної освіти.

***Ключові слова:** м'які навички (soft skills), тверді навички (hard skills), позашкільна освіта, заклади позашкільної освіти, інноваційний розвиток, Нова українська школа.*

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