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NEW LOOK AT SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DEBATE TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract. The article highlights theoretical and practical aspects of the relevant contemporary issue of development of soft skills of pre-service primary school teachers by means of intensification of debate in the classroom. Modern society requires from specialists not only deep knowledge in their fields, but also the ability to effectively communicate and interact with others. Soft skills development through debate technology is a contemporary and innovative approach to enhancing essential interpersonal and communication skills. Debate technologies contribute to the development of argumentation skills, the ability to listen, respond to the arguments of opponents and express one's opinions clearly and convincingly. The approach combines the traditional practice of debate with modern technology to provide a more engaging and effective learning experience. The author analyses the problem from two perspectives: development of students' soft skills, on the one hand, and pedagogical potential of debate in this context, on the other. The definition of the concepts "soft skills" vs "hard skills" is generalized, the factors of efficient application of debate technologies are outlined. The researcher proved that ability to arrange engaging debate in different academic courses at the university is a characteristic feature of professional competence of an innovative educator as it helps develop students' key skills. The formation of the latter takes place both in individual subjects teaching and in the process of subjects' integration.

Keywords: soft skills, debate technology, debate formats, pre-service primary school teachers, Pedagogy Faculty students.

1. INTRODUCTION

With rapid and consistent advancements in global technology, the development of soft skills of any field specialist, including education sector has never been more important. Innovations in the system of general secondary and higher education of Ukraine (modernization of the types and structure of education institutions; updating the educational content considering best world practices; improving the quality of training; development and testing of new pedagogical technologies; changing the forms and methods of education and control of students' educational and cognitive activity; modernization of management forms and methods of contemporary educational institutions; training teachers to use the best teaching experience for pedagogical cooperation, etc.) are determined by the state policy implementation in the sector of education and science. Such processes produce more than just implementation of new elements to educational practice, however, also require a unique individual style of the teacher's professional activity.

A teacher of the 21st century, an educator in the post-war Ukraine is a professional able to take on huge responsibility, capable of dealing with the current situation of social changes in a timely manner,

ready to practice lifelong learning for oneself and foster it for students. Such a teacher is oriented to science-based educational organization process directed to interaction, shows own readiness to comprehend new information, possesses appropriate value orientations, is flexible in professional thinking, owns developed professional self-awareness and a high level of self-actualization, possesses the art of reflection. Considering the above-mentioned needs and requirements the contemporary teacher must be aware of the following key features of 21st Century Education and be ready to implement them (See Fig 1.).

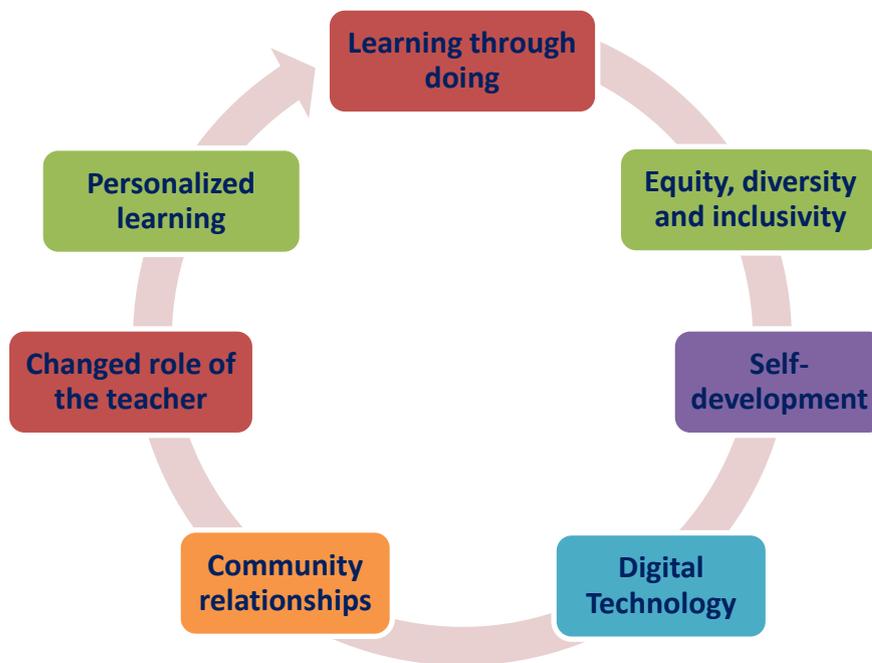


Fig 1. Key features of 21st Century Education

Source: The survey was conducted by the author of the article

Nowadays, more than ever before, students (future primary school teachers) must be able to think logically and critically and offer a new approach to apply innovations and resolve complex problems. Without developing key 21st century skills participants of the education progress might sink in the fast-paced industry era. Since our education system is not yet producing students with the needed skills and abilities to fit in creative working environments, that are critical to Ukraine's future development after the war. However, the rapid infusion of AI into nearly every area of our life, from education to manufacturing, has risen an issue about which exactly skills will really be needed to succeed in the labour market of the future.

Most scholars agree to the skills, which include utilizing and allocating resources, teamwork and negotiation, and those identifying tools for different tasks. The proper solution to overcoming these challenges is to empower students with the skills and abilities to succeed in the jobs of tomorrow as when being in-service teachers at primary school, they will efficiently teach a new generation of young Ukrainians to feel competitive and successful while studying.

2. DISCUSSION

The problem of development students' soft skills has become the subject of interdisciplinary study of scientists and in-service teachers who deal with the issues of interaction, knowledge and skills of the active individual. Among foreign researcher it is urgent to note findings by Aclan, E., Briggs S., Haselberger D., Heckman J., Kautz T., Noor A., Valdez, N.; valuable approaches were provided by the

following Ukrainian scientists Abashkina O., Bobro A., Dlugunovych N., Holubnycha, L., Girich, Z., Kostikova, I., Korniyush G., Koval K., Movmyga N., Pidsonna O., Smagina T., Shunevych O., Zelenska L. etc. In their scientific searches most of them focused on the formation of students' soft skills in the system of teacher education; identified new approaches to soft skills development of future primary school teachers in New Ukrainian School; and substantiated the conditions for the development of flexible skills at advanced training courses during informal education.

According to Kenan's 21st century Education Model, "this involves giving students opportunities to immerse themselves into projects and activities that compel them to develop modern skills and an innovative outlook. Central to this effort is focusing on the most important element of any education system: the teachers responsible for delivering education to students. No other component of the education system has a more direct relationship to student outcomes than teachers. Teachers who are motivated, know how to engage students, and understand how to utilize modern pedagogies will almost always outperform their peers in the classroom, as measured by levels of student engagement and student performance" (Kenan's Model of 21st Century Education. 21st Century Education).

Ukrainian officials in the education sector claim implementation of the state policy Concept dealing with reforms in general secondary education. This is reproduced in the Professional Standard for the following educational professions "Primary School Teacher of the institution of general secondary education", "Teacher of the institution of general secondary education", "Primary Education Teacher" (with a junior specialist's diploma) (Professional Standard for the professions. 2021). Being developed on the basis of the teacher's major work functions (updating education content, application of innovative methods and digital technologies; principles of pedagogy of partnership; organization of a healthy, safe, developmental, inclusive educational environment; effective management of educational process; continuous professional development), the Professional Standard changes stereotypes regarding professional and pedagogical competence of a modern educator and draws attention to the importance of performing new roles as a tutor, a teacher-facilitator, a teacher-moderator, a teacher-advisor, coach. The latter require not only professional competences, but also general for which soft skills are central.

The results of the study indicate that the studied concept has gone through several rebranding and educators use various terms to describe them e.g., social skills, flexible skills, durable skills, employability skills, 21st-century skills personal or even interpersonal skills. Nevertheless, it doesn't matter what they are called, or even precisely which ones are more important, the core list still looks much like it did several years ago. What currently essential to focus on is how to teach or develop them in educational settings. Unlike hard skills which are easily measured, quite stable, identified with specific features, and are also part of job instructions or qualification characteristics; soft skills refer to non-technical abilities, can be used for a range of different professions and are not very easy to define. Therefore, they are considered not measurable skills. Only 2 out of 10 skills are hard skills, the rest are soft skills. The latter have a common nature, are vital for an effective professional and life self-determination of any individual, regardless of occupation presenting a key importance for professional development and career growth. Such skills include communication, leadership, teamwork, self-awareness, empathy, emotional intelligence, and much more.

Communication. Communication skills have always been important in the teaching profession. However, communication today is far more complicated notion than before. It also implies the ability to interact digitally via numerous innovative devices and applications and not only in the official language but at least in one of the foreign languages. Besides, sometimes inexperienced educators have trouble teaching students, explaining material just because their communication skills are not good enough.

Leadership. Any teacher needs to be able to show the ability to lead a classroom. It is often a challenge to make students be active, engage them in creative learning and promote them develop their own leadership skills in classes. Moreover, a teacher-leader may become a model for colleagues and help teach other teachers to become better educators.

Teamwork. Any educator is always a part of the team, works at curriculum development,

implementing projects, dealing with troublesome cases of upgrading courses, etc. Teamwork includes other vital skills as ability to listen others, sometimes persuade and argue own ideas, be patient and tolerant in collaboration process.

Multi-Tasking. It is all about contemporary teachers. They must be multitaskers as they perform many things in the classroom simultaneously: explain material, using multimedia board, watch students working at individual tasks, consulting and answering questions at the same time. To be able to balance a lot of different things in one's mind is crucial for the teacher.

Time Management. The more efficient one manages time, the more one manages to accomplish. Being a teacher involves exceptional time management skills. Educators need balance the long-term goals of the classroom, the students' immediate educational needs and a huge amount of paperwork that comes with every separate assignment. With effective time management skills, teachers will undoubtedly increase their potential, productivity and provide a higher quality education for their students.

Problem-Solving. Every decision in teacher's activity deals with either problem-solving or decision-making. Factual problem-solving marks the process of applying a method or technique to a task that is a subject to a definite set of conditions and that the problem-solver has not met before, with the aim to find a reasonable and practical solution. Teachers who possess such a skill are normally very creative innovators.

However, even if soft skills' crucial role is perfectly recognized in education field worldwide, in reality, there is a huge gap between students' gained soft skills in the classroom and those required at job placement. Now nearly 3 in 4 employers claim it is difficult for them to find graduates with the appropriate skills. And even though more companies are embracing skills-based hiring practices, the ability to accurately assess soft skills remains intangible.

Our survey conducted among the senior students of Primary Education Department of the Pedagogy Faculty in Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University (PNU from here and after) showed that mentioned above and other essential soft skills for modern teachers are often overlooked by educators of different academic courses, although being vital for both pre-service teachers to make progress as future professionals, and in-service teachers to succeed in doing their job and developing these skills in their students. Within our research we organized a questionnaire to find out development of which soft skills is given considerable attention during teaching different university disciplines. Among the suggested soft skills were the following: time-management, problem-solving, communication, leadership, emotional intelligence, teamwork, decision-making, punctuality, reflectiveness, goal setting, and quick thinking (See Fig 2).

Which soft skills are sufficiently developed during different courses at the university?

80 відповідей

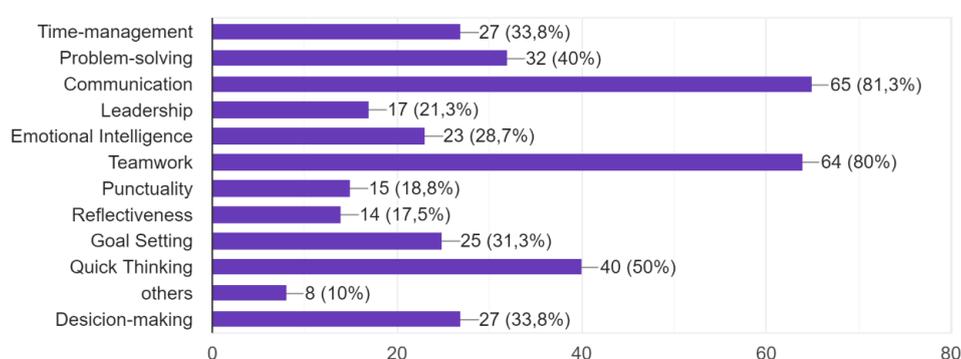


Figure 2. Development of soft skills in the university classroom

Source: The survey was conducted by the author of the article

The analysis of 80 students' answers showed that PNU teachers do arrange engaging learning environment in the classroom as all of the suggested skills are given attention to. However, they organize the education process in such a way that assignments performed by students are mostly directed at development of communication skills (81.3%), teamwork (collaboration skill) – 80%, and quick thinking – 50% of teachers. This can be easily explained as students claim they are often involved in group project activities both online and offline. Presenting projects results involves speaking activity which is an integral part of communication skill improvement. The question-answer period which normally follows the presentation process requires the students' ability of quick thinking and responding procedure. Development of other soft skills are not given proper teachers' attention during classes. For instance, only 40 % of teachers create tasks to foster students' problem-solving skills and 33.8% - decision-making. 28.7% of educators help students understand emotions, manage them in positive ways to relieve stress and anxiety, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflicts. Very close to the previous is the number of teachers (31.3%) who train students to set goals and plan how to divide their time reasonably between different activities. Teachers give 21.3% of their effort and time to develop students' leadership skill in the classroom and only 18.8% to punctuality formation. The least attention is given to such a vital skill as reflectiveness (17.5% among other skills) which fosters analyzing one's own experiences to improve the way to learn or work. This valuable skill can help learners and professionals gain experience, confidence and self-awareness. Definitely teachers organize education process in the way to develop other soft skill not mentioned in our survey – 10%; depending on the specifics of the academic course.

Striving to educate a personality of a new democratic society, professional and responsible educators apply innovative approaches, methods and tools to develop soft skills alongside hard skills in the classroom. Scientists and practitioners have long been convinced of the need for dialogue between all the subjects of educational process. At the same time, dialogue is understood as an equal interaction between a student and a teacher or students themselves, designed to prepare them for a constantly dialogic and contradictory adult life. Determination and courage in expressing one's point of view, readiness to argue personal declaration in various life and professional situations, maximum tolerance in statements and behavior can be formed only under the condition of using active dialogic learning technologies. However, there aren't many efficient pedagogical tools to realize it and what is more, educators know little about them thus, implement them rarely in their teaching practice. Therefore, in our research we offer a new look at soft skills development of learners through debate as efficient means of creating a more engaging and interactive learning environment.

According to Darby M., debate as an educational technology is supported by Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning as it uses both lower order and higher perceptive skills including comprehension, knowledge, application, analysis, assessment and synthesis. Debate, as an ancient teaching method used by the Greeks 4,000 years ago (Darby, 2007), has been widespread as an extracurricular activity in many world countries, mostly in the form of competitions or discussions but not as a classroom activity.

Considering the issue of introducing debate into pedagogical practice, we can note that certain points have already been analyzed by Ukrainian and foreign researchers, including Aclan, E., Arkhypova T., Babenko L., Bascuñán D., Darby M., Zyma O., Kyienko-Romaniuk L., Klaxon N., Kolyada E., Lisinska T., Limmerman H., Martin A., Mudryk L., Othman M., Pometun O., Rosas-Maldonado M., Scott S., Steinberg D., Shykhnenko K., Sushchenko I., Zare P. and others.

There are many formats of students' debate in the world, but the following four are the most popular: "British Parliament", "Karl Popper" format, "Lincoln-Douglas" format and "American Parliamentarian/Parliament".

The "British Parliament" format was created at the beginning of the 20th century in Great Britain due to the support of the famous universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Currently it is the official format of the World Championship of Parliamentary Debates, in which more than 300 teams from all over the

world participate. These teams represent colleges and universities, and the format itself is used to be considered student.

Karl Popper was an influential Austrian and British philosopher of the 20th century. He was a supporter of the idea of an “open society”, and such a society cannot be imagined without the ability to speak and listen thus, the debate format was developed and named in his honor. Such debate is also called value debates, designed to reflect different points of view on controversial issues of history, religion, education, culture, family and social order. Currently, K. Popper’s format is considered classic and is used for the purpose of training beginners, high school or first-year students, because as it is considered the “softest” format of team debate.

The “Lincoln-Douglas” format is most often used by presidential candidates during election campaigns. It originated from a series of debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas back in 1858. The great debate between A. Lincoln and S. Douglas consisted of 7 speeches in different cities of the state of Illinois. Each of their discussions lasted 3 hours and related to the issue of slavery in the United States. Nowadays the rules of this format are transferred into the classroom and are used as engaging debating game for students.

The debate format “American Parliament” is popular among students in the US and Canada and has become famous in the mid-1990s. The two most famous organizations that conduct debates in the format of the “American Parliament” are Canadian University Student Intercollegiate Debate Organization (CUSID) and American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA).

No matter which format you will decide to implement in your classroom, we note that all of them have several points in common: there is always an “approval” side and a “disapproval” side; a relevant or important topic, which is formulated in the form of a statement; a clear sequence of participants’ speeches with defined time limits; mandatory feedback between the participants and the judges observing the debating process.

Higher education institutions take various initiatives in working out own ways of developing students’ soft skills in HE classrooms, however, not many implement students’ debate as an efficient tool of their formation. For instance, professor Zelenska describes her experience of development of future teachers’ soft skills during their professional training in higher education institutions by means of different coaching technologies (Zelenska 2021, pp. 60-64). Interesting for us was a foreign experience (Aclan, Noor Aziz & Valdez, 2016) of using debate as an educational tool to strengthen students’ soft skills in the classroom while mastering English as a foreign language. The researchers proved during three debate stages the most important for active soft skills fostering was pre-debate stage. During this one the students drilled almost all crucial soft skills. The while-debate stages, the most challenging one for students, to researchers’ minds, required fast critical thinking and effective communication skills. In the post-debate, the participants practiced lifelong learning, critical thinking, communication skills, team-work and leadership (Aclan, Noor & Valdez, 2016). Maritza Rosas-Maldonado, PhD in applied linguistics from Liverpool University and researcher at Universidad Andrés Bello found pre-service teachers gain potential benefits of using in-class debate. She noted this technology is meant to encourage soft skills development and to foster confident feelings and responses among students. Thus, the students considered debates as a instructive tool for their educational practice in the future (Rosas-Maldonado, Bascuñán, & Martin 2020, pp. 133 – 150). Apart from HE UA educators have experience of using debate in general secondary institutions as well. Teachers-practitioners exercise debate in different school subjects and note they can bring a positive impact on formation key skills of their learners. Experience of UA teacher Babenko L. proves debate technology is a relevant means of development system thinking of students at studying history at school. In her manual the teacher offered some efficient recommendations for choosing a debate format for school students, namely Karl Popper debate, according to her findings is very useful. In the research she reveals the specifics of the rules of various formats debate, regulations, functions of players, gives practical advice on the use of debate technologies in education process (Babenko 2018).

Considering the efficiency and impact of using students' debate on development of soft skills of the latter we launched a different experience of promoting this technology among UA educators. Best practices of "most successful countries shows that informal education in all its manifestations allows to increase human capital, which contributes to a better productivity, generation and development of innovations, development of technological entrepreneurship, etc. Informal education, in the form of intensive programs and trainings, mass open online courses, allows to form practically significant competencies. It promotes the development of 21st century skills or "soft skills" as they say today - such as creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, information and time management and achievement of subject and personal outcomes stated in school standards. In fact, informal education solves the problems that a traditional school system sometimes does not cope with" (Blyznyuk 2022, p. 5-11). Therefore, the topic "Pedagogical ideas for conducting student debates in class: tools and techniques" was offered for the participants of advanced training courses annually conducted by the team of CIET "PNU EcoSystem" at PNU for teachers and stakeholders of institutions of professional pre-higher and higher education.

Consequently, a new approach to using debate had noticeable impact on soft skills development of regional educators in the following directions:

enhanced engagement and accessibility - online platforms, video conferencing, and virtual reality can be used to host debates, making them accessible to a wider target audience. This technology can help individuals practice debating skills remotely and engage in discussions with peers;

real-time feedback - debate technology often includes features for recording and analyzing debates. Participants receive real-time feedback on their speaking style, tone, and argument structure and this allows them to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments in real-time;

structured learning - debate provides structured frameworks guiding participants through various stages of argument development, counterarguments, and contradictions. This structure helps educators understand the logical flow of arguments and improves their ability to present their ideas coherently;

simulated scenarios - simulate real-world situations, allowing learners to practice handling challenging discussions, conflicts, and persuasive interactions. This is particularly useful for individuals preparing for public speaking, negotiations, or leadership roles;

cross-cultural communication and experience exchange - online debate platforms connect individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds engaging in debates with people who were forced to leave Ukraine and find work overseas. It enhances cross-cultural communication skills and exchanging best practices, fostering an understanding of varying perspectives;

reduced anxiety - for individuals who may be hesitant to engage in face-to-face debates, technology offers a less intimidating platform. The digital environment can help reduce performance anxiety and encourage more individuals to participate actively;

flexibility and convenience - debate technology allows participants to practice at their own pace and on their own schedule. Flexibility is always beneficial;

collaborative Learning - debate can facilitate collaborative learning experiences as participants work together to prepare arguments, share resources, and develop more comprehensive viewpoints.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The provided scientific research threw the light upon two problems: development of students' soft skills, and pedagogical potential of debate technology in this context. Integrating new look at soft skills development through debate offers a dynamic and adaptable learning experience for learners. Analysis of current research and publications revealed the interest of Ukrainians and foreign researchers in the field of education to the issue of introducing debates into the classroom practice. In the educational process, debates are used not only for the purpose of overcoming psychological toughness and reduction of feelings of anxiety and fear of mistakes during communicative activity (ice-breaking), but also directly with educational purpose. The students' monitoring showed that PNU teachers arrange

engaging learning environment in the classroom for development soft skills but not many of them were given sufficient attention.

Our experience proves debate as a pedagogical technology causes not only the high interest of the listeners in the educational materials reflecting professional specificity, but also helps develop a number of skills that belong to the category of “soft skills” among which is critical thinking, operative organization of thoughts, experience of appropriate behavior in conditions conflict situations, effective communication activities and public skills, confidence in one's own strengths and abilities, quick orientation in challenging situations and defending one's opinion. This approach demonstrated efficiency. This is proved by the results of our notes, survey and participants’ feedback on the educational process.

A further perspective for his problem deeper research is seen in the development methodical support for the effective use of this approach regularly during teaching the discipline “English for professional purposes” with the students obtaining Master’s degree at Pedagogy department of PNU.

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У статті висвітлено теоретичні та практичні аспекти актуальної сучасної проблеми розвитку soft skills вчителів початкової школи шляхом активізації дискусії на заняттях. Сучасне суспільство вимагає від фахівців не лише глибоких знань у своїх областях, а й вміння ефективно спілкуватися та взаємодіяти з іншими. Дебатні технології сприяють розвитку навичок аргументації, вміння слухати, реагувати на аргументи опонентів та висловлювати свої думки чітко та переконливо. Розвиток гнучких навичок за допомогою технології дебатів – це сучасний та інноваційний підхід до вдосконалення основних навичок міжособистісного спілкування. Представлений підхід поєднує традиційну практику використання дебатів із сучасними технологіями з метою забезпечення більш привабливої та ефективної реалізації навчального процесу. Автор аналізує проблему з двох ракурсів: розвитку у soft skills студентів – майбутніх учителів початкової школи, з одного боку, та педагогічного потенціалу дебатів в цьому контексті, з іншого. Узагальнено визначення понять «м'які навички» та «тверді навички», окреслено чинники ефективного застосування дебатних технологій. Дослідниця довела, що вміння організовувати захоплюючу дискусію з різних навчальних курсів в університеті є характерною рисою професійної компетентності педагога-новатора, оскільки сприяє розвитку ключових навичок студентів. Формування останніх відбувається як при навчанні окремих дисциплін, так і в процесі інтеграції предметів.

Ключові слова: soft skills, дебатні технології, формати дебатів, вчителі початкової школи, студенти педагогічного факультету.