Management Students' "Soft Skills" in Foreign Language Training at Technical University

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Abstract. The article discusses the need for the bachelor students' soft skills development in technical universities. The main objective of our research is the identification of the conceptual model "soft skills" opportunities in technical students training. Moreover, the demand of these skills in modern labor market is accentuated. The term "soft skills" is one of new tracks of the dynamically changing world. The article includes the content - analysis of the word «soft skills» providing the integrity of the term perception and its contents, applicability level in communication, and also some ways of the students' soft skills development in their foreign language practical training.

1 Introduction

In modern society the popular and competitive expert is the professional possessing the certain well-developed communicative and administrative skills. Development of soft skills is one of educational trends and obligatory factors which allow one to find out available competences of the experts more productively. Today there is the need for the education transformation taking into account calls of the digital world and new technological revolution in favor of the soft skills development. With the help of these skills it is possible to provide personnel leadership in a digital era. The value of "the 21st century skills" is just that they help to be guided better in the quickly changing world, in the different new directions, disciplines and technologies and to understand the flows of new information. Having obtained "the 21st century skills", everyone will be able to be engaged in the self-education and self-development.

Nowadays more and more often the special management terminology includes the concept "soft skills" - a complex of superprofessional skills, unspecialized, important for career. These skills are responsible for successful participation in the working process, high efficiency but at the same time they are not connected with the certain field of activity. The term "soft skills" is one of tracks of dynamically changing world. However, despite its popularity, the universal understanding does not exist yet. The English synonym of the term "soft skills" means "flexible skills". According to the Oxford dictionary "soft skills" are "personal qualities which allow one to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people", for example, to carry out productive communication. At the same time the meaning of concept demands the

integrative understanding of the environment and a personal resource [1].

First of all, it should be mentioned that soft skills are a complex of skills: skills of interpersonal communication, human skills, life skills, social skills, traits of character, social intelligence, emotional intelligence. Soft skills provide effective interaction with the environment, cooperation with others, successful participation in working process, high efficiency and achievement of the reasonable purposes taking into account professional skills.

As we have already mentioned, soft skills, unlike professional skills in traditional understanding ("hard skills"), do not depend on certain profession. They may be defined by personal qualities (responsibility, discipline, self-management), social skills (social intelligence, communication; work in team; emotional intelligence), management qualities (time management, leadership, problem solving, critical thinking) [2].

Besides we should point out such important qualities as: strategic outlook against tactical positions, multifunctional thinking, common sense, collecting full actual information, ability to get on well with people, the problem and conflict solving, the argumentation, critical thinking, the best stuff recruitment, etc.

The essence of soft skills is represented by the basic knowledge of the so-called modern technological directions as elements of deep thinking: neurotechnologies and artificial intelligence, systems of the distributed register, quantum technologies, new production technologies, the industrial Internet, robotics and sensory components, wireless communication technologies, virtual and added realities technologies [3].

Further we are going to discuss the main important soft skills that our students have. They are: the ability to work in team, the ability to motivate and convince people, the problem solving ability and the conflict

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solving ability, decision making ability, oratorical skills, leadership skills.

It is necessary to mention that the well-developed soft skills make the expert unique, capable to cope with the professional activity in constantly changing conditions. As we know soft skills are especially important in the professional field. It is motivated by the fact that any professional activity means contact making, formal and informal communication with people. The effective communication ability is the basis of the vital and professional success, and also for career making of any expert.

2 Materials and methods

The materials and methods used are determined by the purpose of the research. A great variety of information including books, scientific articles, Internet resources was analyzed and summarized. Our research was focused on the students' soft skills development in the process of foreign language training (the management department of Moscow Automobile and Road Construction State Technical University (MAGTU (MADI)).

So our research is based on the following scientific-pedagogical methods such as: the bibliography analyses, content-analyses, professional situation modeling.

Many scientists at different times were engaged in the research of the concept "soft skills". We see that their views were not the same in explaining and giving main characteristics of this concept. It happens because of the difference of their perception features and their scientific interests connected with the issue of the "soft skills" development. It should be noted that all existing definitions of the concept are partially interconnected and interdependent, and some of them closely intertwine with each other. From our point of view the practice of the complete concept "soft skills" perception and its contents is quite successful and may be defined by means of the content analysis.

According to T. A. Yarkova, today "our society needs the creative people overcoming level of the average opportunities, active and business minded". Therefore success in modern society - "is not only what we get at birth, but for ninety percent it is our efforts and hard work" [4].

Without necessary "soft skills" it is usually impossible to achieve real success. D. Goulman writes that efficiency of the person in his professional activity directly depends on the level of his soft skills development which, in his opinion, distinguish "successful experts from unsuccessful, the effective organizations from inefficient" [5]. T.A. Yarkova refers to the leading personal qualities of the 21st century "critical nature of thinking and activity; openness to everything new and the ability to live in new conditions; communicative skills; ability to find and to use information; the desire and aspiration to constant self-improvement, etc.". In other words, "soft skills" are the skills of effective communicators and leaders necessary both in everyday life, and in professional activity,

acquired by the additional education and personal life experience and used for their own development namely in their professional activity.

So, N. V. Zhadko considers the soft skills development in the field of the professional interpersonal relations which include their enterprise working and organizational contexts, understanding and representation of their corporate interests, their statement and solution of the professional tasks [6]. A. I. Ivonina, O. L. Chulanova, Y. M. Davletshina suggest that "soft skills" should be considered as "soft competences" which may occur in "professional activity". These characteristics are very important for employers and when making a competence list for certain employees" [7, 8, 9].

N. V. Zhadko discusses the soft skills formation in business on the basis of the activity approach. Taking into account the "soft" skills component structure as an activity unit she worked out the conceptual model consisting of three components: motivation; context; technologies and algorithms. These components are interconnected and interdependent, finally representing the single structural unit.

3 Results and discussion

It is quite productive to use this model in foreign language teaching at the technical university. There are both resources for the motivation development and creation or restoration of a context for skills development at the English classes. The algorithms of actions development and behavior in communicative situations is an integral part of a foreign language lesson.

To define what soft skills our students need it is necessary to pay attention to their future professional field of activity. So, for example, for the bachelors of the following specialties - 380302 "Management of the Organization", 380303 "Human Resource Management", 230301 "Technology of Transport Processes" the most important skills are the skills of interpersonal communication such as critical thinking, problem solving skills, effective team work skills, communicative skills, conflict solving skills.

It is necessary to say that, the algorithm of the soft skills development may be logically included into the classical education: knowledge - abilities - skills. That is why reading newspaper and journal articles and also professional texts may be a source of knowledge and motivation for the students' soft skills development.

Besides, during the interactive English classes it is also possible to create conditions for the practical use of the knowledge gained from various sources and the soft skills development. So, for example, in a role-playing game, in cases students have an opportunity to use the obtained knowledge by algorithms development, reviewing and working out a strategy for correct interaction with partners in communication.

Today the use of educational cases in Russian education is a very actual task. The case represents the description of a certain real situation made in a special way and may be used for students training to analyze

different types of information, its generalization, problem setting skills and developing possible problem solving ways according to the stated criteria. The case training technology is a training by action. The main task of a case method is getting knowledge and the abilities development as a result of students self-educational activity when they have to solve conflicts. Due to all this activity they get a creative professional knowledge, skills, abilities and critical thinking development.

In modern education the teacher is faced with a difficult task: it is necessary not only to know his subject well, to have innovative methods of teaching, to be able to organize educational process carefully, but also to use new technologies of training. While studying professional English topics in our Technical University we regularly use a method of projects, a communicative method, innovative technologies, computer modeling, multimedia systems, and also a case method.

There are different approaches to the training technology by a Case Study method in international education.

It is possible to use several types of cases in teaching:

1. Practical cases. The students here carry out research of the real events and situations which will be discussed in the course of training.

2. Training cases. The name of this type of case speaks for itself. Its main task is training.

3. Research cases. The students here are involved in research activity.

The Case Study method has a number of advantages if to compare with the traditional methods. First, this technique allows combining the theory and practice in training. Case study method makes it possible to develop students' soft skills in search of various sources of information as students should use that information which they will find by themselves. The analysis of life situations helps to remember and understand decisions quicker.

Second, the process of any problem solving stated in a case requires the creative approach to its decision as the process of knowledge in this case has a collective character. It helps the students to keep up closely with the rules of communication: group work, ability to listen to other students, give arguments to improve their position, find the logical scheme for the problem solving. During the case study classes students will not miss but will think to carry out the research and discuss it.

Besides, this method gives chance to the poor students to take part in discussion because when they analyze life situations there may be different points of view on the revealed problems and there is no the only one correct decision. All students will offer their own answers.

The main thing to be noticed here is that to be successful in teaching it is necessary to work hard and carefully for teacher. First of all the teacher needs to work out the case strategy for students. Besides the teacher has to think over a form of the presentation or how to present a case and to plan the students' activity combining individual and group forms of work.

Except for a complex preliminary teacher's work as we said above, there are the problems with summing up

and assessment of the students' work. It requires special attention to each student of the group because it is necessary to estimate activity, creativity and at the same time students' knowledge. Also it should be mentioned that the traditional five-point system of results assessment does not allow to give the correct mark to the student. The hundred-point system of an assessment is more convenient and flexible. It gives chance to determine the student's level of knowledge correctly. And for the best assessment of result it is better to combine five-point and hundred-point systems of assessment: "5"-from 85 to 100 points; for receiving 4 it is enough to gain from 84 to 70 points, and is "3" if the student gains less than 70 points. One more advantage of a case method is that there is an opportunity to involve even poor students to take part in the discussion, even those students who have poor knowledge and low communicative abilities. That is why it is possible to avoid bad points in assessment.

As for the Case Study we use during the foreign language classes for the students of the technical departments of our university, it is possible to note that this method can be one of the most successful and productive in training. The method of cases is complex and includes main types of speech activity: reading, speaking, writing, listening. The students get an opportunity for the real foreign language communication in the discussion process and in interaction with the teachers and other students of the group. The most important thing in this method is the organization of work with a case and conducting discussion with the teacher and theoretical training of the students for the forthcoming work.

For example, here are some cases for soft skills development: "Poorly Defined Responsibilities Versus a Well Managed Fleet", "How an International NGO Improved its Safety Record", "Personal Use of Vehicles", "Only the Designated Driver of a Vehicle Should Drive It". We use them in our English classes for the students of the following specialties: 380303 "Human Resource Management" and 230301 "Technology of Transport Processes".

For all students of the management department of our University the oral presentation skills (such as mini - project) is one of the most important educational, consulting, research activity. It is also the key skill for the promoting of the professional services in the market.

The research project as an element of the students' creative activity is very popular in the practice of training for our students. It makes possible to direct cognitive activity and to develop competence. That is why it may be considered as the unique pedagogical technology focused not only on integration of the actual knowledge, but also on getting the new one. The communicative basis is the main goal of training in a foreign language: the main skills and abilities of cross-cultural communication, the basis of sociocultural and linguistic knowledge, communicative and speech skills of students, and also communicative culture development of the student's language identity, language development and speech competences, training in terms of cross-cultural communication on a foreign language,

cultural development of oral and written language in a foreign language in situations of professional, official and informal communication.

For our English classes we mainly use three types of projects:

- group project in which research is conducted by all group and each student studies a certain aspect of the chosen subject;
- mini-research consisting in carrying out individual sociological poll with use of questioning and interview;
- project on the basis of work with information recourses.

Let us give consideration to the fact that there is the difference in the final product characteristics in the project activity. That is why it is possible to point out the following types of projects in the field of the foreign language training:

- constructive-practical presentation projects;
- informative-research projects;
- creative works - the free literary composition, a literary translation into the native language;
- publishing projects - the blog, information for the websites, creative laboratory or a workshop and so forth.

Our experience shows that only active and creative approach in making projects helps the students to find the most important requirements to use the project method correctly. We can mention some of them:

- a significant problem in the research, creative plan or the task demanding the integrated knowledge, research search for the problem solving;
- practical and theoretical importance of the estimated results;
- the organization of the self-training, including individual, pair, group work, small groups for the students during the English classes;
- the structuring of the project's content;
- research methods: the problem determination, the main tasks of the research, the hypothesis determination, the discussion of the research methods, the final results determination, the analysis of the obtained data, summing up, conclusions.

So, after carrying out the analysis of technology of the project technology it is possible to say that during the search of the necessary information, during the process of analyzing English texts and articles, while discussing and classifying the obtained information all our students are engaged in different types of foreign-language speech activity: listening, speaking, reading, writing, rendering, summarizing [10].

As a rule, our senior students have already obtained the experience of project-making, the PowerPoint-making, report-making for the different types of audience. Students successfully find relevant information that corresponds the requirements to the PowerPoints, they carry out profound analyses, they summarize a lot of information. Despite this fact, our students often say that they come across some difficulties during the work with their public reports (communicative, psychological difficulties, etc.). For many students the most difficult thing is to come into contact with the audience, and also keeping the public attention and interest throughout the whole report. For example, here are some projects for

students' soft skills development for their public reports in English: "The System of Operational Management in Russia", "The Health and Safety in Transport Management in GB and Russia", "The Human Resources in Transport Management in Russia and GB".

Such projects motivate the students for their search of necessary information based on their professional knowledge and terminology to carry out professional communication. According to the didactic requirements it is useful to organize such type of work regularly while studying "Foreign language". Moreover, it will lead to formation of the required soft skills necessary for the students' activity and they will be able to use them successfully in the future.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that the main methods of the soft skills development in teaching English for the students of the technical universities are:

- self-training - individual studying of the necessary information (reading books, articles, blogs), taking part in webinars;
- search for feedback - getting feedback from groupmates, teachers, tutors and employers concerning the success in the behavior while developing a certain skill;
- training based on the experience of the others and a networking - finding and studying a model of a successful behavior of a person who possesses a high level of this competence development, work with the mentor;
- special tasks (background trainings) – the self-training tasks developing the certain competences, cultivating the chosen personal qualities or, on the contrary, the utilizing addictions;
- the solution of cases - research of certain situations with the offer of optimum solutions;
- training through expansion of subject lines on the basis of binary thematic oppositions - inclusion in studying the necessary information with the help of a short topic, story by the analyses of its emotional and personal importance;
- development in the process of work - search for more effective behavior models when solving certain professional tasks .

It is necessary to take into account that the definitions of different authors of the concept "soft skills" we have analyzed are interpreted in different ways. However, all definitions are partially interconnected some of them intertwine with each other. Soft skills are connected with the communicative skills which are necessary for successful work in the professional activity. Besides there are some risks for a person to come across. Nowadays there are a lot of different soft skills models; however they have not only distinctions but also similarities. So, for example, many researchers refer communicative skills, decision-making and time-management skills to the obligatory elements of the model.

We would like to conclude by saying that except above-mentioned methods it is possible to find also the list of ways of the soft skills formation in foreign language training. This process can be endless and will depend on many factors - requirements of Federal State Educational Standard in Russia, requirements of labor market, interests and creativity of the students and teachers. It is necessary for the technical universities students to develop professional management soft skills and interaction in the highly competitive and hi-tech environment in the conditions of global metatrends:

- digitalization of all life spheres;
- automation and robotization;
- globalization (economic, technological and cultural);
- demographic changes;
- formation of network society, the network technologies and decisions based on the blockchain technology;
- ecology;
- acceleration, escalating speed of changes of the world.

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