

# Developing soft skills of youth: regional experience

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**Abstract.** This article is devoted to the problem of developing soft skills in the youth of Chelyabinsk region (the Russian Federation). The young generation requires possessing moral and ethical qualities and values, the leading tool for the formation of which is education. The aim of this study is to analyze and generalize the soft skills of young people in the region and develop educational technologies at the university aimed at developing these skills. The structural components of soft skills include: emotional intelligence (the ability to recognize and manage the feelings and emotions, the ability to understand and influence the emotions and feelings of other people, empathy, rapport); communicative skills (interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, collaboration, organizational skills, negotiation skills and public speaking skills). The system of developing soft skills of youth implemented at the university, implies: 1) the inclusion of students into the activities of volunteer organizations and public associations; 2) implementation of social activities at the university; 3) modeling of extreme pedagogical situations in the educational process of the university.

## 1 Introduction

Constant social and economic changes in the life-meaning and value orientations of young people lead to an increase in the importance of the educational component of education. The reforms carried out in the educational system were primarily aimed at improving the quality of education, and to a lesser extent at the educational mission of the educational process.

For society today, a young generation requires forming moral and ethical qualities and values, the leading tool for the formation of which is educational activity. New approaches to the implementation of educational activities in the future will help solve the social problems of both youth and society as a whole.

When developing a system of upbringing flexible skills of youth, it is necessary to take the trends in the development of society and education into account, namely: the transformation of the personality traits of the younger generation, the general strategy of digital education, the possibilities of the electronic educational environment and digital didactics, etc.

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Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze and generalize soft skills of youth in the region and to develop educational technologies in the university aimed at fostering these skills.

Objectives:

- Analyze the phenomenon of "soft skills" as a factor in the stabilization of the regional labour market and youth policy.
- Define a conceptual approach to research on soft skills of youth.
- To develop and implement technologies of education of soft skills of youth.

This study tends to improve the current education and it has the foresight character, as it presents a hypothetical theoretical understanding of the problems on developing soft skills, participation, digital education and interaction of educational subjects.

## 2 Methods and discussion

Soft skills are flexible social skills that are understood as meta-professional skills assisting the solution of the life problems and work with other people.

The main purpose of the concept of skills is to show what exactly is important to consider in education to prepare a person for a successful professional life: so that he is a qualified specialist being in need in every sphere of life.

It should be noted that the problem of soft skills is mostly represented in foreign studies of the last 30-40 years, although the first mentioning of "softs kills" appeared in pedagogical literature in the 50-s of the XX century [1].

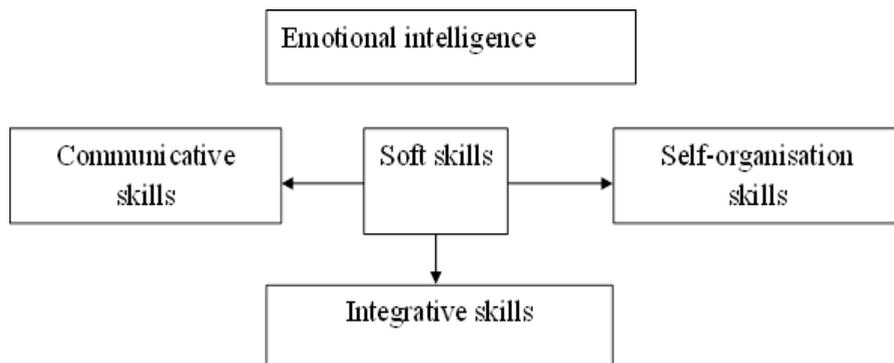
The theoretical concept of the formation and development of "soft skills" began to be actively developed by Western scientists in the early 90-s. Over the past decades, a number of different international and state programs for their development have been proposed abroad. "Soft skills" programmes are included in educational standards, curricula of educational organizations of various levels [2].

According to S. Majid [3], "soft skills" refer to personal attributes and qualities that determine the specifics of a personal professional behavior. The authors include communicative skills, self-motivation, time management skills, and the ability to make decisions in various professional situations as "soft skills".

According to the documents of the World Health Organization, soft skills include skills that positively affect the overall mental health of a person, namely, the ability to adapt for changing environment resulting in constructive behavior, to effectively cope with difficulties, the ability to make decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively and create healthy relationships [3].

The representatives of various fields of science, employers, public authorities assume that "soft skills" are necessary for the effective implementation of various professional activities, primarily in the field of "person-to-person" mode [4].

Having studied foreign literary sources, we identified the main types of "soft skills" that are of particular importance from the point of view of successful professional activity of young people (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Types of soft skills required for professional growth of youth.

Summarizing the views of various authors on the phenomenon of "soft skills", we highlight the following:

- the concept of "soft skills" has been actively developed abroad since the 50-s of the XX century, in local science - only in the last decade;
- the main types of "soft skills" include emotional intelligence, communication skills, self-organization skills, integrative skills;
- the content of the main structural components of soft skills includes: emotional intelligence (the ability to recognize and manage your feelings and emotions, the ability to understand and influence the emotions and feelings of other people, empathy, rapport); communicative skills (interpersonal skills, teamwork, collaboration, organizational skills, negotiation skills and public speaking skills); self-organization skills (ability of pre-adaptation, self-motivation, resistance to stress and self-regulation, planning and organization, persistence in achieving results, time management skills); integrative skills (learnability and the ability for self-development, reflexive and prognostic skills, motivation to achieve success, independence of thinking (autonomy), problem solving skills, creativity and innovation, critical thinking).

The leading highlights of the concept of "soft skills" that are significant for the problems of our research include:

- "soft skills" are the necessary element of the professional competence of young people, ensuring the effectiveness of implementation in a general situation of uncertainty;
- such "soft skills" as emotional intelligence, communication skills, self-organization skills, integrative skills can become the content of the components of youth readiness for professional activity;
- young people with "soft skills" are professionally required in conditions of general uncertainty, since it is much easier for them to adapt to changing environmental conditions;
- "soft skills" organically complement the professional competencies necessary for young people to carry out professional activities;
- "soft skills" allow young people to solve emerging problems, make informed decisions, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively and build relationships, successfully carry out professional activities.

Some characteristics of soft skills components are given below:

#### Emotional intelligence

In recent years, local and foreign researchers have been paying more and more attention to the problem of emotional intelligence [5; 6; 7].

The pioneers in this field were P. Solovey and J. Mayer, who believe that emotional intelligence is "the ability to observe own emotions and the emotions of other people, to identify the source of them and use them to guide thinking and taking actions" [8]. The main

functions of emotional intelligence are the ability to regulate emotions, their identification and expression, as well as the further use of emotional information in thinking and activity.

We consider emotional intelligence to be the necessary component of professional competence. Emotional intelligence allows tracking the emotions and feelings of other people and using them for subsequent deliberate decision-making, to distinguish genuine emotions, to identify them [9]. Emotional intelligence is seen as awareness of emotional state, as a set of necessary social skills, experience of interaction and responsible behavior.

#### Empathy

The problem of empathy is interdisciplinary in nature and is in the focus of attention of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and other sciences. Having analyzed various approaches to the phenomenon of empathy [11; 12], we identified the following interpretations of it:

- co-experience of positive and negative emotions, preservation of mental comfort, mental health and positive emotions, identification of personal positions of other people;
- a way of coexistence with another person, a non-judgmental acceptance of a person, an affective reaction that is more responsive to someone else's rather than own experiences;
- complex education, communication skill, carried out in a situation of interaction and allowing to realize the "way of being" of another person;
- a person's ability to empathize, the ability to put oneself in the place of another person.

Following N.S. Shkitina, by the term "empathy" we mean "a moral new formation, which is based on tolerance as a basic characteristic of the humanization process, a rational-intuitive reflection of another person through the processes of analogy, identification, identification, congruence and reflection" [10].

#### Communicative skills

Human life consists of interaction with society, building relationships with various people through communication. Communication itself plays a very important role for any person and his mental state, which is reflected in his behavior in relation to the people around him. In the process of communication, each person gradually masters communicative skills.

There are many different approaches and views to the definition of "communicative skills". To date, there is no unambiguous interpretation of this concept.

Communicative skills are the ability of a person to interact with other people adequately interpreting the information received, as well as correctly transmitting it.

The communicative skills of a person are associated with the communicative properties of a person and their communicative potential, as well as communicative competence, which serves the one of the conditions for the readiness of young people for professional activity [13]. Communication skills of the person are closely related to flexibility in communication, with the accumulation and alignment of the skills and abilities of interpersonal interaction in the communication situation.

Public speaking skills. Practicing public speaking skills is one of the most important objectives in the process of professional training of young people [14].

According to T.V. Vorobyov [15], teaching public speaking for young people implies not only mastering prosodic and extralinguistic means of expressive speech, but also non-verbal means of influence (signal language, eye contact, etc.), phonetic and phonemic competences (tone of voice, impact on the audience with the help of the pitch of the voice), but also the establishment of control over the emotional state and anxiety. The main reasons for tension and anxiety before actual public speaking include:

- extreme immersion in performance, focus on personal experiences;
- low assessment of own abilities for public speaking, self-doubt about the content of the speech;
- lack of experience in public speaking or traumatic experience of unsuccessful public speaking [16; 17].

The main mistakes that lead to failed public speaking, and, consequently, to the traumatic experience associated with them, include:

- imposing your opinion on the audience;
- rapid beginning of the speech, when the audience does not have the opportunity to get used to the speaker, suppressing the speech;
- untidiness, too bright clothes;
- lack of the smile, tension, fussiness, unfriendly mood;
- confusion of thought, lack of logic in the speech.

Thus, developed communicative skills constitute a special behavioral complex that provides:

- the stability of the personality behavior and its ability to consistently perform duties associated with professional activities;
- adaptive abilities to various conditions of professional activity;
- building a system of interpersonal interaction with other subjects of professional activity;
- lack of tension and anxiety during public speaking;
- conflict-free ability to avoid stressful and extreme situations in professional activity.

Summing up, we came to the conclusion that "soft skills" serve necessary elements of the professional competence of young people, ensuring the effectiveness of implementation in general situation of uncertainty.

### **3 Research results**

While elaborating the system of developing soft skills to young people, we took the trends in the development of society and education into account, namely: the transformation of the personality traits of the younger generation, the general strategy of digital education, the possibilities of the electronic educational environment and digital didactics, etc.

The organization of socially significant and useful activity is considered by us as a type of joint social activity with students, which allows future teachers to create conditions for their development, to master the methods and forms of their social and pedagogical support. Students under the guidance of teachers participated in project and socially useful activities, engaged in research work, carried out social projects, etc. Students were actively involved in career guidance work.

As part of the industrial practice, seminars were organized for students, in which mentors from enterprises and educational organizations took part. They shared the methods and forms of educational work, acquainting them with the specifics of professional activity. Mentors presented ways of transferring professional experience, broadcasting moral values and qualities, creating comfortable conditions for realizing the personal potential of students in production.

The interaction of students with mentors from enterprises contributes to the improvement of the psychological climate, creates opportunities for the independent construction of individual educational and career paths. Mentoring in the education of soft skills was implemented in various forms: short-term and goal-oriented mentoring, excursions to the enterprise, joint educational events, acquaintance with the carriers of the key values of corporate culture, the formation of a systematic view of the work of the enterprise.

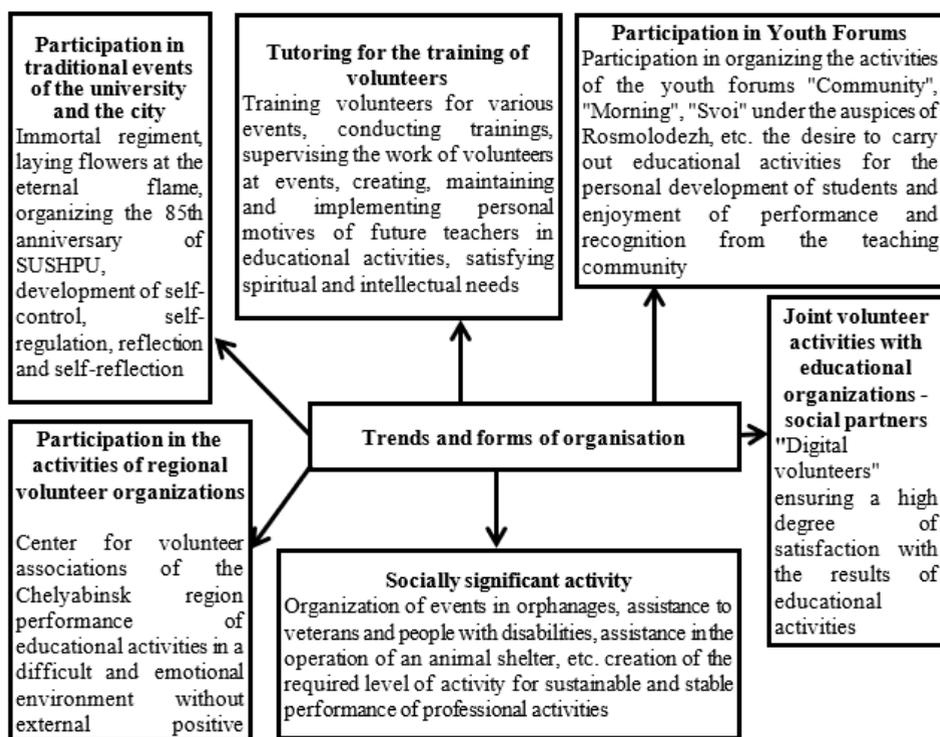
The students mastered the professional competencies necessary for the successful implementation of their professional activities by studying the disciplines "General and professional pedagogy", "General psychology", "Developmental psychology", "Methodology of educational work". "Methodology of educational work" deals with the methods, forms and means of educational activities, relevant for professional education. Active educational technologies implemented in the process of teaching this discipline are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The program for the implementation of active educational technologies within the discipline “Methods of educational work”

<b>Educational technology</b>	<b>Events performed</b>	<b>Results</b>
Training sessions	Training of conflict-free pedagogical communication "Pedagogical conflicts, their causes and ways of their settlement" Training for the development of tolerance and empathy "Respect the student"	Trainings allow simulating educational situations, bringing students closer to real professional activity, due to which they develop stress resistance, empathy, emotional intelligence, and there is a rejection of stereotypical thinking
Project activities	Designing a target and meaningful model of educational activities according to the proposed areas of educational work Designing an individual educational route for students (opportunities, needs and achievements of students are proposed in advance)	Students master the abilities in the field of designing educational activities, technologies of pedagogical support of students, the ability to work with various contingents of students, they form a stable image of the profession and educational activity as its leading component
Educational hackathon	Educational hackathon “Designing innovative educational systems”	Students mastered the skills of public speaking and protection of projects, learned to defend their point of view, gained a positive experience of teamwork aimed at achieving a specific result
Discussions	Discussion “Possibilities of using foreign innovative educational technologies in the practice of educational activities of VET” Discussion “Educational potential of mentors from an enterprise during the period of practical training”	The students have formed the experience of a well-grounded defense of their own point of view, intellectual activity and flexibility, the ability to non-standard solutions to educational problems, subjectivity, the ability to mobilize in various professional situations
Upbringing activities	Students' solution of situations of choice of social and moral positions Modeling situations of moral and ethical choice during the implementation of educational activities with students	The solution of educational tasks made it possible to form students' positive experience of educational activity, the ability to develop flexible behavioral reactions, contributed to the mastery of technologies of pedagogical support of students
Upbringing objectives	Educational task "Learning from the masters" (it is necessary to get acquainted with the proposed plan of educational work of class teachers, to evaluate their pedagogical expediency) Solution by future pedagogues of situational educational objectives	Students master the methods, forms and means of organizing educational activities, learn to create conditions for the development of personal qualities of students, they develop plasticity of thinking, through introspection and self-control, the ability to critically assess the results of professional activity develops
Portfolio technology	Making a portfolio of educational achievements for each student	Students develop analytical and reflexive skills, they realize the importance of educational activities, due to which a value attitude towards it is formed.
Couching technology	Coaching of pedagogical and social support of students in modern socio-cultural conditions Pedagogical consulting of students as the coaching technology	Students master the forms of social and pedagogical support of students in educational activities and professional and personal development, as well as methods of pedagogical support of students in difficult life situations

The inclusion of students in the activities of volunteer organizations and public associations gives educational activities the social orientation, allows students gaining experience of interacting with different people, and in the future to apply this experience in professional activities.

For more than 10 years the volunteer activity of students at SUSHPU (South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University) has been supervised by the “Volunteer Center”, which organizes their participation in various actions and events. Experienced volunteers conduct lectures and seminars, teaching future educators the practice of volunteering. Volunteer activities of students are carried out on the principles of voluntariness and freedom of choice. The scheme for the implementation of volunteer activities at the university is shown in Figure 2.

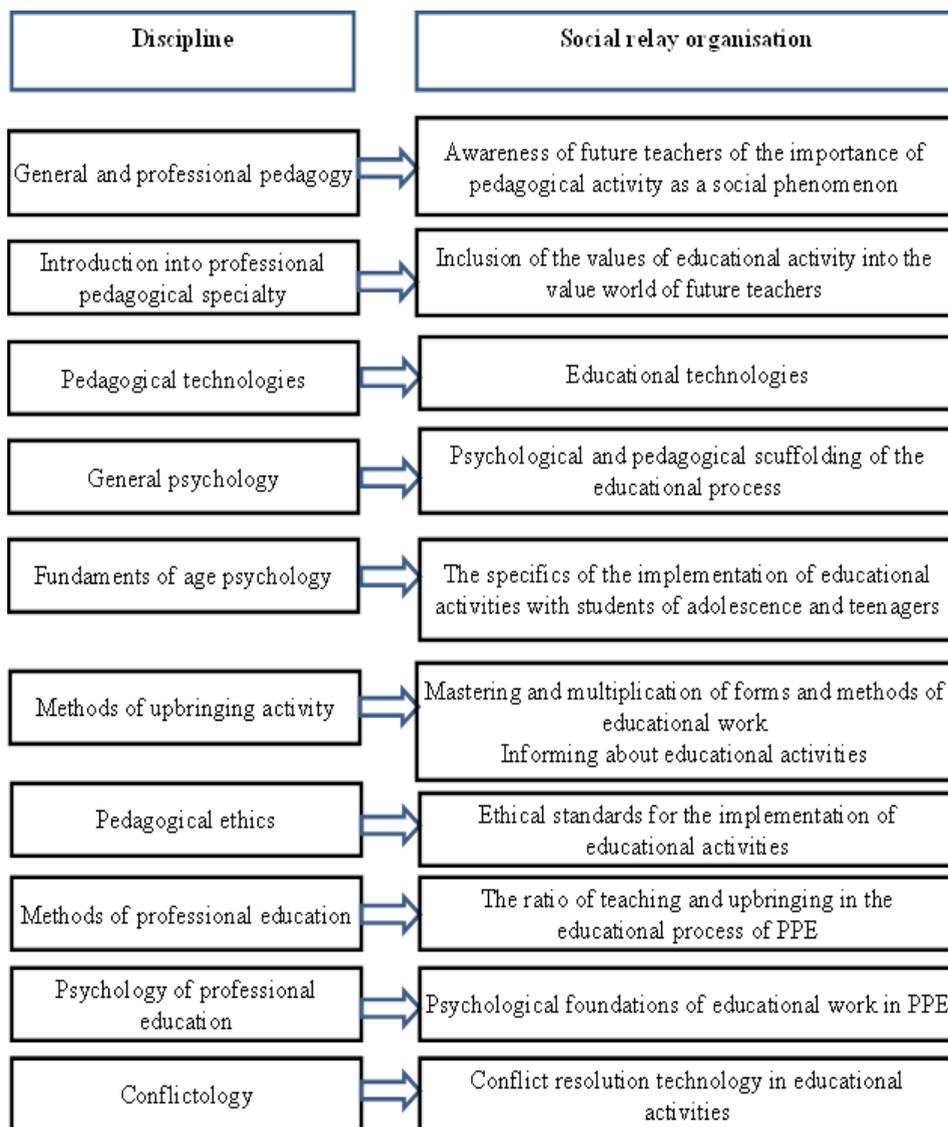


**Fig. 2.** Scheme for the implementation of volunteer activities at the university.

#### Implementation of social relay races at the university

It promotes the transfer of life and professional experience, patterns of behavior, types of reactions to certain events, value attitudes towards professional activities from teachers and mentors to students.

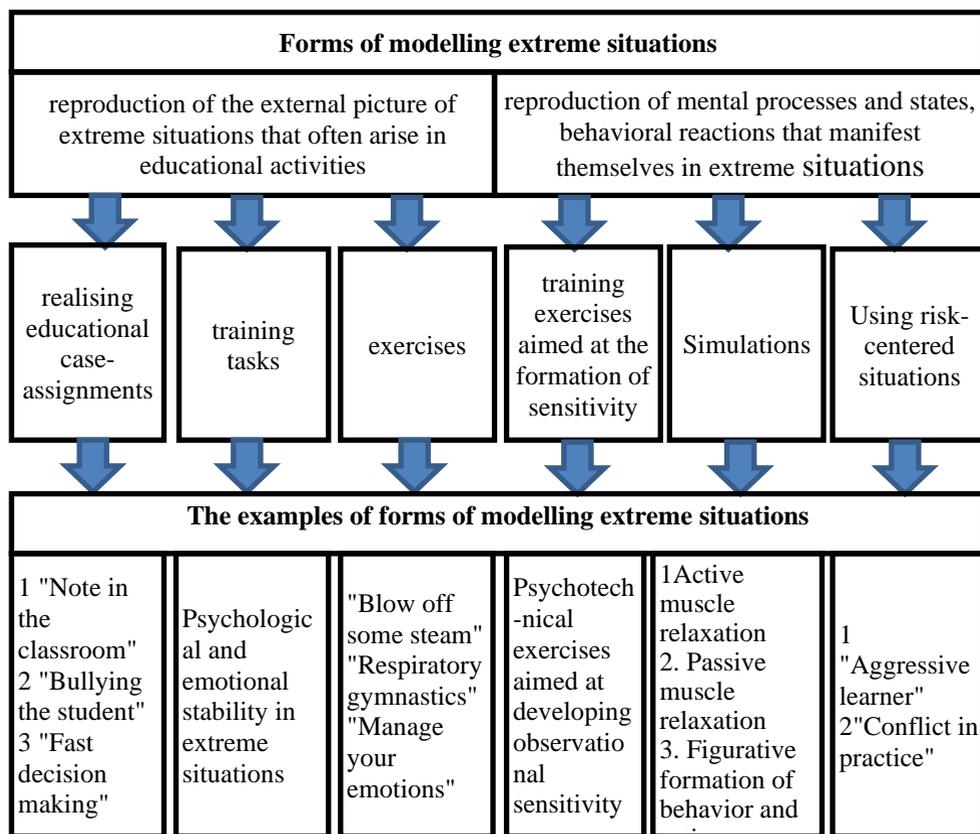
Figure 3 shows a diagram of the implementation of social relay races in the course of mastering the disciplines of the psychological and pedagogical cycle.



**Fig. 3.** Scheme of the implementation of social relay races in the course of mastering the disciplines of the psychological and pedagogical cycle.

Modeling extreme pedagogical situations in the educational process of the university

It allows future teachers mastering the typical techniques for the implementation of educational activities in non-standard conditions for ‘insuring the student’s competence’ [17, p. 73] and their adaptation for the «educational and professional environment» [18, p. 301]. The scheme for modeling extreme situations in educational activities in the process of students training is presented below (Figure 4).



**Fig. 4.** Scheme for modeling extreme situations in educational activities in the process of students training.

Psychotechnical exercises aimed at developing observational sensitivity allowed creating the atmosphere of trust and openness in the group, helping future teachers learn to perceive and understand the emotional state of other subjects of the educational process. In the process of interacting with other participants in the training, various verbal and non-verbal means of establishing interpersonal contacts were tested, their effectiveness in various situations, including stressful ones, was also tested.

Active muscle relaxation contributes to the formation of students' ability to relax various muscle groups, thereby removing muscle clamps that occur in stressful situations. Future teachers fix in memory the pleasant state obtained as a result of the exercise and try to repeat it in a real educational situation.

So, the creation of this organizational and methodological condition is necessary for the development of stress resistance and the ability to act in a team manner, adequately and effectively, calmly react to unforeseen circumstances.

## 4 Conclusion

For society today, a young generation is needed with formed moral and ethical qualities and values, the leading tool for the formation of which is educational activity. New approaches

to the implementation of educational activities in the future will help solve the social problems of youth and society as a whole.

When developing a system of upbringing soft skills of youth, it is necessary to take the trends in the development of society and education into account, namely: the transformation of the personality traits of the younger generation, the general strategy of digital education, the possibilities of the electronic educational environment and digital didactics, etc.

The inclusion of students into the activities of volunteer organizations and public associations is the included testing the scheme for the implementation of volunteer activities at the university and the participation of students in student associations at various levels.

Implementation of social relay races at the university resulted in the contribution to the transfer of life and professional experience, patterns of behavior, value attitude to educational activities from teachers and mentors to students in the course of mastering the disciplines of the psychological and pedagogical cycle due to the approbation of the scheme for implementing the program for modeling social relay races during teaching practice.

Modeling extreme pedagogical situations in the educational process of the university allowed students mastering the typical methods of carrying out professional activities in non-standard conditions by using various forms of modeling extreme pedagogical situations.

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