

UDC 378.147.091.33-027.22:792.091]:811.111

DOI: 10.31652/3041-2439-2025-4-10

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS OF FUTURE TEACHERS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES: EUROPEAN PRACTICES

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### Abstract.

The article highlights the problem of developing soft skills of future foreign language teachers in the context of European educational practices. A theoretical analysis of scientific statements on the definition of the essence of the concept of «soft skills», their role in the formation of professional competence of a teacher has been carried out. The article presents the experience of the European Union countries (Poland, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany) in developing soft skills of future teachers in foreign language classes, emphasising the specifics of using such teaching methods as storytelling, discussion of problem situations based on the content of videos or podcasts, staging, theatricalisation, joint teamwork, project activities, creative presentation of results. The authors present the progressive forms of foreign language classes (Language Days, Speaking Marathons, Reflective Round Table, Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms) that are actively popularised in the EU countries to develop the soft skills of future teachers.

The article presents the results of a survey of teachers of Vinnitsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University, in particular the Faculty of Foreign Languages, the Valentina Voloshyna Faculty of Preschool and Primary Education, who work with students of the educational programmes 014.021 Secondary Education (the English Language and Foreign Literature), 014.022 Secondary Education (the German Language and Foreign Literature), 013 Primary Education. Secondary Education (Language and Foreign Literature (English)). According to the results of the survey the European experience of developing soft skills of future teachers is actively implemented in foreign language classes through the use of project activities, trainings, debates, team and group work, role-playing games, peer teaching, etc. The study also showed that majority of future teachers are aware of the importance of developing soft skills for their professional and personal growth. At the same time, the need for a more systematic application of innovative methods for the development of soft skills in foreign language classes has been identified and substantiated.

**Keywords:** soft skills, future foreign language teachers, European educational practices, professional competence.

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УДК 378.147.091.33-027.22:792.091]:811.111

DOI: 10.31652/3041-2439-2025-4-10

## Розвиток soft skills майбутніх учителів на заняттях з іноземної мови: європейські практики

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### Анотація.

У статті висвітлено проблему розвитку soft skills майбутніх учителів іноземної мови в контексті європейських освітніх практик. Здійснено теоретичний аналіз наукових тверджень щодо визначення суті поняття «soft skills», їхньої ролі у формуванні професійної компетентності майбутніх педагогів. У статті представлено досвід країн Європейського Союзу (Польща, Фінляндія, Нідерланди, Бельгія, Німеччина) щодо розвитку soft skills майбутніх учителів на заняттях з іноземної мови, наголошено на специфіці використання таких прийомів навчання: сторітелінг, обговорення проблемних ситуацій за змістом відео чи подкастів, інсценізація, театралізація, спільна командна діяльність, проєктна діяльність, творча презентація результатів. Авторами наведено провідні форми занять іноземної мови («Language Days», «Speaking Marathons», «Reflective Round Table», «Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms»), що популяризуються у країнах ЄС з метою розвитку soft skills майбутніх учителів.

У статті представлено результати опитування викладачів Вінницького державного педагогічного університету імені Михайла Коцюбинського, зокрема факультету іноземних мов, факультету дошкільної і початкової освіти імені Валентини Волошиної, які працюють зі здобувачами вищої освіти освітніх програм 014.021 Середня освіта (англійська мова та зарубіжна література), 014.022 Середня освіта (німецька мова та зарубіжна література), 013 «Початкова освіта. Середня освіта (мова і зарубіжна література (англійська)). Опитування показало, що європейський досвід розвитку soft skills майбутніх учителів активно впроваджується на заняттях з іноземної мови шляхом використання проєктної діяльності, тренінгів, дебатів, організації командної та групової роботи, рольових ігор, методики «peer teaching» тощо. У ході дослідження також встановлено, що більшість майбутніх педагогів усвідомлюють важливість розвитку soft skills для свого професійного та особистісного зростання. Разом із тим, визначено і обґрунтовано потребу в системнішому застосуванні інноваційних методик для формування soft skills здобувачів вищої освіти на заняттях з іноземної мови.

**Ключові слова:** soft skills, майбутні учителі іноземної мови, європейські освітні практики, професійна компетентність.

**Introduction.** The current system of training future foreign language teachers in the European Union (EU) is undergoing significant transformations due to globalisation processes, digitalisation of education and increased requirements for teachers' professional competence. In this context, the issue of developing soft skills that determine the effectiveness of pedagogical interaction, communication, leadership and creative rethinking of reality is of particular importance. A modern teacher not only transmits language knowledge, but also acts as a facilitator of intercultural dialogue, organiser of the educational environment, mentor and communicator. Effective performance of these roles requires a wide range of socio-communicative, emotional, ethical and cognitive competences that ensure successful professional activity in changing educational contexts. Foreign language classes contribute to the development of soft skills through many aspects of the educational process that go beyond purely linguistic knowledge. Future foreign language teachers learn to express their thoughts clearly and structured, listen attentively to the interlocutor, which improves their active listening and ability to cooperate. Foreign language classes often include discussions of various life situations, which allow students to analyse the emotions of characters or interlocutors, better understand their own emotions, etc. When analysing texts, news, articles or preparing arguments for debates, future teachers develop the ability to evaluate the information from different perspectives, form their personal opinion, etc. Foreign language classes become a real training ground for the development of soft skills, because some students may not have a high level of language proficiency, so they have to experiment, invent, work in teams, be creative, learn to understand the interlocutor from the first word, etc.

#### **Analysis of research and publications.**

The European experience of developing soft skills in the system of teacher training is extremely valuable for the countries reforming their own educational systems. Within the European Higher Education Area, a holistic model of a competence-based approach has been formed, in which soft skills are considered as the core component of a teacher's professional competence. The significance of the European experience lies in its systematic nature, practical orientation and interdisciplinarity. Analysis of the educational programmes of the pedagogical universities in EU countries shows, that soft skills can be developed not only through special trainings or individual courses, but also through integration into the content of professional disciplines, educational practice, intercultural projects, and digital learning.

The need to develop soft skills of future teachers is emphasised in the National Doctrine of Education Development of Ukraine in the XXI century, the European Pedagogical Constitution, the Law of Ukraine 'On Education', the Higher Education Standard for the speciality 014 Secondary Education, the Higher Education Standard for the speciality 013 Primary Education of the field of knowledge 01 Education / Pedagogy. They focus on the need for constant improvement and development, the capacity for growth, self-expression, self-development and self-realisation of future teachers as competent, creative and socially active professionals. The basics of soft skills development have been studied by the leading philosophers, psychologists, and educators. The works of European scholars (L. Anderson, M. Caligiuri, L. Lipman, P. Moss, S. Tilly) reveal the issue of soft skills development. Ukrainian scientists have also studied the peculiarities of the development of flexible personal skills: K. Koval (the development of soft skills as a sign of success of a modern citizen), T. Kozhushkina (formation of soft skills through personal interaction), S. Nakhod (comparative analysis of soft skills and hard skills), P. Moss, S. Tilly (the development of soft skills through consideration of all individual

characteristics of the personality).

**The purpose of the article** is to theoretically substantiate the specifics of developing future foreign language teachers' soft skills by means of European educational practices and to test the peculiarities of their use in the educational process.

**Presentation of the main material.** The issue of soft skills development is related to the European integration processes in our country. N. Lazarenko notes that foreign experience is extremely valuable for our country and specifies that «when determining the possibilities of implementing foreign experience in the education of Ukraine, it is important to take into account the modern domestic methodology, spiritual and general culture of society» [5, p. 6].

European schools began to study the issue of soft skills development in the late twentieth century. Thus, P. Moss and S. Tilly argued that soft skills serve as a means of presenting hard skills. With the help of flexible skills, a person can successfully present himself/herself, his/her knowledge and skills, establish cooperation faster, gather like-minded people around him/her, etc. [13, p. 54]. According to M. Cinque, soft skills are a set of personal characteristics that distinguish a person from others, form the basis of his or her character and form the personal «I». The researcher believes that the development of flexible skills is influenced by the person's environment, interests, and abilities [9, p. 389]. L. Anderson substantiates the concept of “soft skills” as an internal stimulus of the personality and insists that a person can best develop his or her flexible skills in stressful, problematic situations that require quick decision and response. The scientist argues that some soft skills may remain undeveloped if a person does not need them [8].

Ukrainian educators also focus on the

development of soft skills. In particular, T. Vasyutina insists that flexible skills are a successful combination of the so-called knowledge, skills, abilities and the individual's own motivation to achieve certain goals. In her opinion, soft skills are manifested in the ability to interact in a team, rationally manage one's time management, be able to persuade and prove one's own point of view, have one's own emotional intelligence and develop it, work on improving leadership skills, etc. [1]. O. Ihnatova and O. Zhovnych indicate that flexible personal skills are the result of the experience gained in the process of growth and formation, it is a worldview that allows you to evaluate each situation, analyse and draw your own conclusions. According to the researchers, soft skills are used for active interaction with other people, allow the individual to establish themselves in the society and realise all intentions [2, p. 115]. D. Matiuk studies the tendencies of lifelong learning development in the German-speaking countries of Europe as a social and pedagogical problem [6, p.32], emphasizes the crucial role of soft skills for the development of students' readiness for lifelong learning [7]. T. Kozhushkina points out that soft skills are a set of human characteristics without which it is impossible to achieve success and actively develop. The researcher offers the following classification of soft skills:

*communication* (the ability to express one's opinion clearly, logically and consistently, the ability to conduct a dialogue and monologue, the ability to listen to the interlocutor, the ability to give a complete answer to a question, the ability to use artistic expression in one's speech, etc);

*self-management* (the ability to properly manage one's time, time management, the ability to analyse and control one's actions, deeds; emotional intelligence, the ability to adequately assess the situation, the ability to control one's emotions, feelings, the ability to empathise, etc);

*productive thinking* (the ability to analyse, synthesise, compare, contrast; the ability to produce

original ideas, think creatively, critically assess the situation, draw one's own conclusions, etc);

*management* (the ability to unite like-minded people, demonstrate leadership skills, ability to work in a team, ability to find a compromise, ability to establish relationships, ability to interact creatively, etc. [4, p. 80].

The Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Module project «Training of Future Preschool Educators and Primary School Teachers in the Development of Children's Soft Skills through Theatrical Activities: European Context» 620252-EPP-1-2020-1-UA-EPPJMO-

MODULE has been successfully implemented at Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University. The group of researchers (O. Zhovnych, O. Demchenko, N. Kazmirchuk, I. Baranovska, V. Podorozhnyi) involved in the project interpret the concept of soft skills as “universal skills of a personality aimed at establishing themselves in society, social formation and recognition”. Researchers identify the most important groups of soft skills for different categories of the population: for children and adolescents (communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, media literacy); for adults (time management, team building, emotional intelligence, developed critical and creative thinking, digital competence); for elder people (emotional intelligence, communication, media literacy) [10].

N. Kazmirchuk, O. Zhovnych and I. Stakhova distinguish the following soft skills typical for future teachers: communication skills, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, teamwork, tolerance, responsibility, leadership skills, creativity and self-development. Scientists emphasise that these skills are crucial for the effective professional activity of a modern teacher, as they ensure not only the

successful performance of professional functions but also the formation of a positive psychological climate in the educational environment. As part of the Jean Monnet Module project, a set of methodological approaches based on European experience for the development of soft skills has been developed. In particular, interactive forms of learning have been offered, such as theatrical activities, role-playing games, modelling of pedagogical situations, training in communication competence and emotional intelligence. The above mentioned methods contribute not only to the acquisition of knowledge, but also to the development of empathy, the ability to interact with the students, and to find creative solutions in problem situations [10].

In the scientific research of K. Kolesnik, N. Komarivska, N. Oliynyk, V. Imber, didactic approaches to the development of soft skills of future teachers are highlighted, namely:

*-Integration of soft skills into training courses.* Many universities include these competences in the learning outcomes of disciplines, which allows them to be formed systematically.

*-Project-based learning.* Working on group projects stimulates the development of communication, leadership, responsibility, and creativity.

*-Reflective learning.* The use of self-assessment diaries, group discussions, and portfolios helps future teachers to be aware of their own professional development.

*-Intercultural interaction.* Academic mobility programmes and international internships create conditions for the development of intercultural competence and tolerance.

*-Digital learning.* The use of ICT in the educational process helps to develop self-regulation, adaptability and effective online communication skills [12, p. 115].

Within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), comprehensive measures are being

implemented to integrate soft skills into pedagogical programmes. These initiatives are implemented through Erasmus+ projects, Teacher Academies, and other inter-university platforms. For example, in Germany, foreign language teacher training includes mandatory courses in pedagogical communication, classroom facilitation, and emotional intelligence. In Spain, it is common practice to introduce Project-Based Learning, which fosters teamwork, initiative, and creativity. In Italy and France, digital tools are actively used to develop digital literacy and teacher flexibility, which is considered as an important component of soft skills. In addition, in the Nordic countries, in particular in Finland and Sweden, the emphasis is on developing reflective thinking, emotional stability and self-regulation of future teachers. These skills are considered to be crucial for ensuring the psychological well-being of teachers and creating a positive educational environment. In Finland, for example, the training of future foreign language teachers includes mandatory modules on the development of pedagogical empathy, collaboration and critical thinking skills, which are integrated into academic disciplines and pedagogical practice. In the UK, considerable attention is paid to the development of communication competence, leadership and effective time management skills. The British model of teacher professional development is based on the principles of reflection and mentoring, which promotes the ability to self-analysis, planning an individual development trajectory and improving pedagogical skills. In Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, soft skills development is implemented through the modules Psychology of Communication, Social Competences of Teachers, and Culture of Pedagogical Communication. They are aimed

at improving interpersonal skills, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence [15, p. 252].

In general, the European experience demonstrates a systematic approach to soft skills development that combines institutional, interdisciplinary and practice-oriented levels. Soft skills are not considered as an optional element but are integrated into all components of the educational process: from the content of academic disciplines and pedagogical practice to assessment methods and professional development. This approach ensures that future foreign language teachers develop a high level of communicative culture, emotional maturity, critical thinking and readiness for innovation in the European educational space.

The University of Jyväskylä (Finland) is one of the leading centres for training future foreign language teachers. As part of the Intercultural Communication and Language Pedagogy course, future teachers take part in joint international projects implemented in cooperation with EU universities under the Erasmus+ programme. Working in multicultural teams helps to develop skills such as effective intercultural communication, teamwork, leadership, and creativity. Project activities involve the creation of interactive learning products (video tutorials, blogs, mini-courses), which are presented during the university event Teaching Innovation Week. Reflection on project results develops critical thinking and the ability to self-assess professional performance [14, p. 157].

The University of Heidelberg (Germany) is implementing the course «Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms». Students take part in simulation lessons where various pedagogical situations are modelled. This format promotes the development of communication and social skills, empathy, tolerance for cultural differences, and the ability to work under stress. Particular attention is paid to reflective activities: after each simulation, a “Reflective Round Table” is held, during which

students analyse their own actions, discuss the effectiveness of pedagogical decisions and receive feedback from their classmates. The course “Language Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms” promotes the development of self-regulation skills, critical thinking and professional self-awareness.

The Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu) (Poland) is implementing the programme «Filologia angielska - specjalność nauczycielska», which includes the course «Soft Skills for Language Teachers». The course combines training sessions, coaching and student participation in the practical project «Teacher as Leader». Future teachers organise language events for schoolchildren (Language Days, Storytelling Clubs, Speaking Marathons), which develop leadership, responsibility, audience skills, and teamwork. One more important component is the creation of the Teacher Competence Portfolio, in which students record their achievements, feedback from participants of events and the results of self-analysis [14, p. 158].

Besides, one of the most effective forms of soft skills development is the Teaching Simulation Challenge, which is widely used in Germany and Finland. Students introduce their fragments of lessons, demonstrating their communication and organisational skills. The performance is followed by a reflective discussion (Reflective Round Table), which helps to develop emotional intelligence, self-control and confidence. Universities in Poland, the Netherlands, and Belgium are implementing the “Design Your Own EdTech Tool” task, in which students create educational games, applications, or language quests. These activities develop creativity, leadership, teamwork skills.

The tasks like the Intercultural

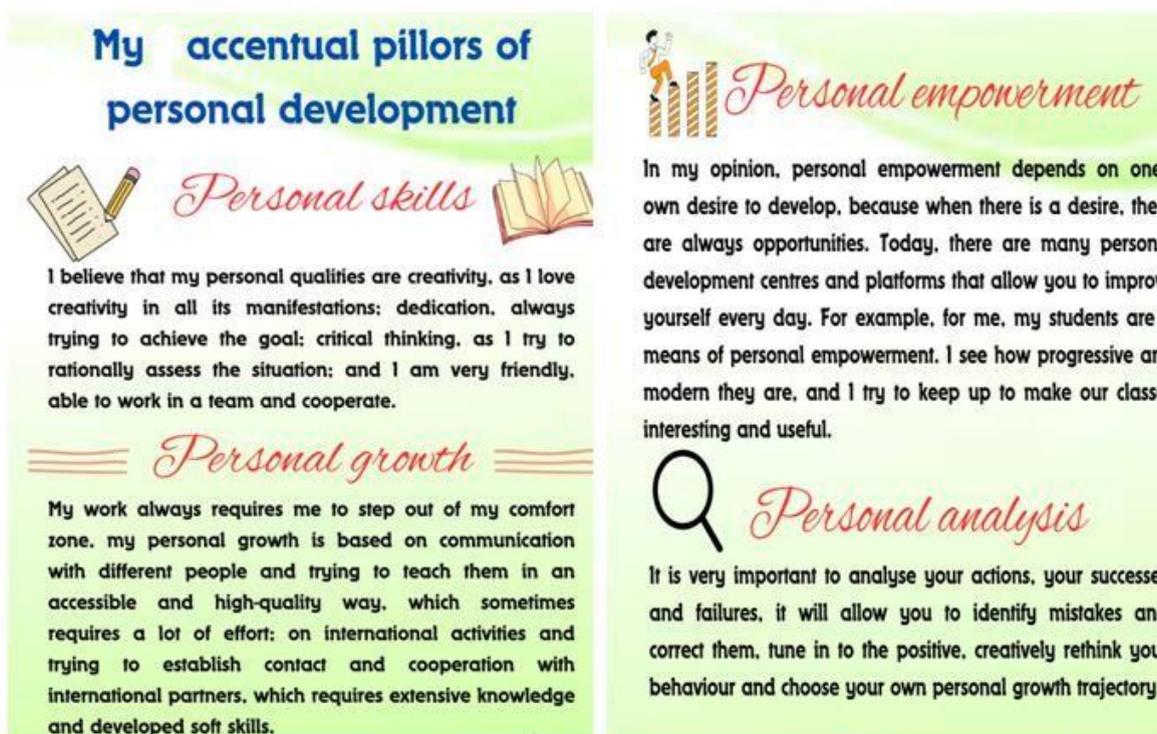
Communication Café, which are implemented in language clubs and international workshops, promote tolerance, openness and intercultural communication. Students discuss topical issues, share cultural experiences, and improve their language and social competence. In Northern Europe, Teacher Reflection Journals are widespread, where students analyse their own experiences and difficulties in teaching, which promotes self-awareness, reflection, and the ability to emotional self-regulation, which is the basis of professional maturity. Language volunteering in France, Italy and Spain allows students to practice teaching in a real environment by organising free language classes for children or migrants. These activities develop social engagement, empathy, leadership skills and responsibility [15, p. 254].

In the course of our research, teachers of the Faculty of Foreign Languages who work on the educational programmes «Secondary Education (Language and Foreign Literature (English))», «Secondary Education (Language and Foreign Literature (German))» and teachers of the Faculty of Preschool and Primary Education named after Valentyna Voloshyna, who work on the educational programme «Primary Education. Secondary Education (Language and Foreign Literature (English))» have been interviewed about the use of European practices in foreign language classes to develop the students’ soft skills. For example, Viktoriia I. (scientific-pedagogical experience – 18 years) says: «I use group discussions and debates in English to develop critical thinking and the ability to express a reasoned position. I also use tasks on Kahoot and Padlet platforms to stimulate teamwork and improve digital literacy». Inna S. (scientific-pedagogical experience – 10 years) expresses her opinion: «In my work, I use cultural and communication projects that promote the development of intercultural competence, tolerance and emotional intelligence («My Country – Your Country», «International Day at School»), in which

students study cultural differences, prepare presentations, and organise intercultural plays in English”. Tamila D. (scientific-pedagogical experience – 23 years) states: “Organising and conducting role-playing games (job interviews, school meetings) and involving students in discussions of intercultural issues contribute to the development of soft skills». Oleksandr P. (scientific-pedagogical experience – 25 years) says: «In my teaching practice, I use the «peer teaching» methodology, when students act as teachers, which develops leadership skills and self-confidence. I also work with authentic

materials (videos, podcasts, articles) to teach students how to adapt to real-life communication situations. After the class, we practice a short reflection in German, and students analyse what they have done well and what they need to work on».

One of the topics that is usually offered at foreign language classes is related to the development of personal soft skills. During the classes, future teachers draw up a detailed programme for their personal growth.



*Fig. 1. Creative work of Inna S., a future foreign language teacher*

Students also actively discuss different types of soft skills and ways to develop them for self-improvement.

In the course of our research a survey of future foreign language teachers on the development of their soft skills has been conducted. The results showed that the

majority of respondents are aware of the importance of soft skills for the professional activity of a teacher. In particular, they noted that such skills as communication competence, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, teamwork and problem solving play an extremely important role in the process of teaching foreign languages. Students also emphasized that soft skills

development is the most effective when participating in project activities, trainings, role-playing games, debates, and interactive classes that stimulate collaboration and reflection. At the same time, some respondents

(22.4%) noted the need for more systematic implementation of soft skills development practices in the educational process, especially in vocational foreign language courses.



*Fig. 2 Creative work by Sofia G., a future foreign language teacher*

**Conclusions.** Thus, the results of the theoretical analysis and empirical research have confirmed that the development of soft skills is an integral part of the professional training of future foreign language teachers. The European experience proves the effectiveness of a systematic approach when soft skills are integrated into the content of professional disciplines, pedagogical practice, intercultural projects and digital learning. This ensures that students successfully develop key competencies such as communication skills, critical and creative thinking, emotional intelligence, collaboration, leadership, and reflexivity.

The conducted survey showed teachers' and students' positive attitude to the development of soft skills and their high motivation to improve them. Future teachers are aware that well-developed flexible skills increase their professional mobility,

competitiveness and ability to interact effectively in a multicultural environment. At the same time, the research results show that there is a need for a more systematic introduction of soft skills development methods into the structure of educational programmes, in particular by expanding training courses, interactive forms of learning, and project activities. A promising area for further research is the development of a model for the development of soft skills of future foreign language teachers, taking into account European standards and digital trends in education, as well as the creation of methodological support for integrating the developed soft skills into professionally oriented language courses.

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Статтю надіслано до редколегії 06.11.2025 р.

Статтю рекомендовано до друку 12.11.2025 р.

Статтю опубліковано 01.12.2025 р.

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