

UDC 378.018.8:364.4-051]:316.61-043.83(045)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/humanitas/2023.4.9>

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To cite this article: Tkachuk, Yu. (2023). Innovative methods of soft skills development of future social workers in higher education institutions. *Vvichlyvist. Humanitas*, 4, 61–69, doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/humanitas/2023.4.9>

INNOVATIVE METHODS OF SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The article is devoted to the problem of developing social skills (soft skills) in future social workers. The progressive information and communication development of the world community, the active introduction of robotics in all spheres of public life in the twenty-first century, the increase in crisis situations in various social groups of Ukraine due to the military aggression of the Russian Federation in our country determine new approaches to the modern training of future social workers in higher education institutions. Along with professional competence, the requirement for a specialist to have qualified social skills (soft skills) comes to the fore. The purpose of our study is to identify and characterise innovative methods of developing soft skills in future social workers in higher education institutions. Methods of the study: theoretical – analysis of pedagogical sources on the studied issues, generalisation and systematisation of data on the development of social skills in students during academic and extracurricular activities; empirical – questionnaire. The study sample consisted of 78 bachelor's (63 students) and master's (15 students) students from 9 higher education institutions. The survey showed that future social workers prefer soft skills development methods using educational web services and online platforms. After analysing innovative methods: training, workshop, case method, brainstorming, project method, coaching, we concluded that it is advisable to integrate them into the educational process of a higher education institution. Since none of them can be considered universal: each of them in certain situations gives different results and this must be taken into account when setting the task of developing (improving) certain soft skills.

Key words: future social workers, soft skills, development, higher education institution, development methods, innovation, integrative approach.

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Бібліографічний опис статті: Ткачук, Ю. (2023). Інноваційні методи розвитку soft skills у майбутніх соціальних працівників у закладі вищої освіти. *Ввічливість. Humanitas*, 4, 61–69, doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/humanitas/2023.4.9>

ІННОВАЦІЙНІ МЕТОДИ РОЗВИТКУ SOFT SKILLS У МАЙБУТНІХ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ ПРАЦІВНИКІВ У ЗАКЛАДІ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

Стаття присвячена проблемі розвитку соціальних навичок (soft skills) у майбутніх соціальних працівників. Прогресуючий інформаційно-комунікативний розвиток світового співтовариства, активне упровадження робототехніки у всі сфери суспільного життя у XXI столітті, збільшення кризових ситуацій у різних соціальних групах України через військову агресію РФ у нашу країну детермінують нові підходи до сучасної підготовки майбутніх соціальних працівників у закладах вищої освіти. Поряд з професійною компетентністю на перший план виступає вимога наявності у фахівця кваліфікованих соціальних навичок (soft skills). Метою нашого дослідження є виділення та характеристика інноваційних методів розвитку soft skills у майбутніх соціальних працівників у закладі вищої освіти. Методи дослідження: теоретичні – аналіз педагогічних джерел з досліджуваної проблематики, вивчення освітніх програм українських закладів вищої освіти зі спеціальності «Соціальна робота», узагальнення та систематизація даних щодо розвитку соціальних навичок у студентів під час навчальної та позанавчальної діяльності; емпіричні – анкетування. Вибірку дослідження склали 78 студентів бакалаврського (63 студенти) та магістерського рівня (15 студентів) з 9 закладів вищої освіти. Проведене анкетування засвідчило, що майбутні соціальні

працівники надають перевагу методам розвитку soft skills з використанням освітніх веб-сервісів та онлайн-платформ. Проаналізувавши інноваційні методи: тренінг, воркшоп, кейс-метод, брейнстормінг, метод проектів, коучинг, дійшли висновку про доцільність інтегративного їх впровадження в освітній процес закладу вищої освіти. Жоден з методів не можна вважати універсальним: кожен з них у певних ситуаціях дає різні результати і це необхідно враховувати під час постановки завдання щодо розвитку (удосконалення) тих чи інших soft skills.

Ключові слова: майбутні соціальні працівники, soft skills, розвиток, заклад вищої освіти, методи розвитку, інноваційність, інтегративність.

Introduction. The realities of the functioning of the global and domestic labour market in the twenty-first century and the peculiarities of modern social work in our country put forward requirements for Ukrainian higher education institutions to train a social worker as a specialist of a new formation with a creative worldview and understanding of the purpose of their own professional activity, who is able to clearly identify and apply the most effective ways and means of social interaction with different social groups of people and promptly solve various social problems.

And therefore, the successful professional self-realization of social workers depends not only on the level of development of professional competencies, so-called hard skills, but also on extra-professional social skills – soft skills.

When developing educational programmes and disciplines in social work, modern Ukrainian higher education institutions are faced with the task of creating an integrated educational space where students can acquire both professional knowledge and skills and practical approaches to the formation and development of social skills – soft skills.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. Ukrainian scholars and practitioners have paid some research attention to the study of certain aspects of the problem of social skills in specialists of different profiles. Thus, N. Haran and V. Zamorotska study soft skills that will be useful in future professional activities (Haran, Zamorotska, 2023); C. Koval studies the mechanisms of social skills development of young people from the perspective of future employment (Koval, 2015); S. Nakhod substantiates the importance of soft skills for the professional development of specialists in sociological professions (Nakhod, 2018); N. Koliada and O. Kravchenko describe the practical experience of soft skills development in higher education institutions (Koliada, Kravchenko, 2020); O. Kirdan and O. Kirdan substantiate the importance of soft skills development in the context of the criteria for assessing the quality of the educational programme

and the descriptors of the National Qualifications Framework (Kirdan, Kirdan, 2022); I. Krasnoshchok, O. Demchenko and T. Kravtsova study some practical aspects of soft skills development in Ukrainian educational institutions (Krasnoshchok, Demchenko, Kravtsova, 2023).

It should be noted that certain aspects of the investigated problem are also considered in the scientific works of foreign scholars. In particular, the theoretical significance of the social skills of specialists is highlighted in the works of R. Grover, D. Nangle, M. Buffie and L. Andrews (Grover, Nangle, Buffie, Andrews, 2020), the key social skills of the future were identified by R. Hipkins, R. Bolstad, S. Boyd and S. McDowall (Hipkins, Bolstad, Boyd, McDowall, 2014); the content of the concept of soft skills was studied by S. Marin-Zapata, J. Román-Calderón, C. Robledo-Ardila and M. JaramilloSerna (Marin-Zapata, Román-Calderón, Robledo-Ardila, JaramilloSerna, 2022); the development of soft skills in higher education students through their involvement in educational games and project activities is considered in the works of C. Toader, I. Brad, C. Rujescu, C. Dumitrescu, E. Sîrbulescu, M. Orboi and C. Gavrilă (Toader & Brad & Rujescu & Dumitrescu & Sîrbulescu & Orboi & Gavrilă, 2023), etc.

It should be emphasised that many works of Ukrainian scientists and practitioners are devoted to the study of various aspects of training specialists in the speciality «Social Work»: O. Butylina, O. Kotykova, I. Melnychuk, I. Savelchuk, Yu. Soroka, I. Romanova, M. Vasylieva and others.

At the same time, we note that in modern conditions, the training of future social workers and the formation and development of their social soft skills in Ukrainian institutions of higher education requires an innovative approach to the organization of student education based on the modernization of the technological, procedural and content content of the educational process through the introduction of innovative pedagogical technologies and teaching methods.

Ukrainian practicing scientists I. Krasnoshchok, O. Demchenko and T. Kravtsova (Krasnoshchok, Demchenko, Kravtsova, 2023: 250–252) highlight the following innovative approaches that can ensure the effective development of soft skills of students: integration of academic and extracurricular activities of students; interactive organization of the educational process; teamwork; application of information and communication technologies; active involvement of students in various practical projects.

According to the researchers, the most relevant pedagogical technologies in educational and extracurricular activities are the following: critical thinking development; project activities; health promotion; problem-based learning; game; case technology; creation of subject-developmental environment; cooperative learning; research activities; information and communication technology (Krasnoshchok, Demchenko, Kravtsova, 2023: 251).

In general, Ukrainian scientists, as well as foreign ones, consider innovative training of future specialists as an organisation of the educational process aimed at comprehensive intensification of educational and cognitive activity through the use of a system of innovative methods that ensure the activity and diversity of mental and practical activities in the process of mastering the educational material.

It should be noted that the theoretical sources and scientific and pedagogical studies analysed by us show that the problem of developing soft skills in higher education students is relatively new, which explains the small number of available studies. Therefore, the issue of introducing innovative methods for the effective development of soft skills in future social work professionals in the educational process of higher education institutions requires additional research.

Aim and tasks. The aim of the study is to identify and substantiate innovative methods of developing soft skills in future social workers in a higher education institution.

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the following tasks are defined: to substantiate the need to introduce innovative approaches into the educational process of a higher education institution and to explore the possibilities of using innovative methods to develop soft skills among future social workers.

Research methods. To realise the purpose of the study and solve the set tasks, theoretical

(systemic and structural analysis of available pedagogical sources to reveal the state of study of the problem under investigation; structural and functional analysis of educational programmes and disciplines for the preparation of bachelors and masters, the content of educational components to assess the practical experience of implementing the educational process and developing social skills in students; generalisation of theoretical and practical aspects of the introduction of forms and methods of developing social and economic skills) were used.

Presentation of the main research material.

In the study, we start from the position that soft skills are skills, abilities and characteristics that allow one to be competitive and successful in professional activities.

Analysis of educational programs and educational disciplines for bachelors and masters, the content of educational components and practical experience in the formation of soft skills in a number of higher education institutions (Uman State Pedagogical University named after Pavel Tychna, Ivan Franko Drohobysk Pedagogical University; National Pedagogical University named after M.P. Dragomanov; Rivne State University of Humanities and Dubna College of RDSU; Zhytomyr State University named after Ivan Franko; KZ «Baltic Pedagogical College» of Odesa region; Bar Humanities and Pedagogical College named after M. Hrushevsky) with the specialty «Social Work», testified that innovative mechanisms of development of modern higher education are based on the following conceptual provisions: cultivation of interest in pedagogical innovations, creation of a creative atmosphere, socio-cultural and economic conditions for the perception and spread of innovations in the educational institution; accumulation of innovative ideas in permanent research and experimental educational environments; integration of the most promising innovative projects into the pedagogical system that actually functions.

Moreover, the enrichment of the new practice of higher education with new educational ideas, methods, forms, means and technologies should correspond to the algorithm: idea – process – result (Melnychuk, 2010).

As part of our research, a survey was conducted among 78 undergraduate (63 students) and master's (15 students) students the above 9 higher

education institutions regarding the clarification of the position of the students themselves regarding methods of developing their soft skills that are attractive to them.

The results of the survey showed that more than half of the surveyed students believe that it is quite significant for future social work that they have the following soft skills: an active civic and life position; analytical thinking; communication skills; skills of competent conversation and public speaking; creation of an emotionally and psychologically attractive environment; purposefulness; the ability to resolve conflicts; the ability to avoid conflicts; creativity; reliability; emotional intelligence; stress resistance (emotional and psychological endurance); adaptability to social problems and cross-functionality; the ability to work in a team, cooperation; leadership qualities and the ability to lead; the ability to inspire new ideas; skills of operational work with a mass of information; work planning; time management; systemic thinking; ability to solve problems and make effective decisions (maximum result at minimum cost); work organization skills; the ability to build an algorithm of actions to provide the necessary social assistance to people; compliance with work (business) ethics; self-confidence; presenter and persuasive skills; interpersonal negotiation skills; time management skills (ability to set priorities and manage projects); customer orientation; knowledge of a foreign language).

The best forms of soft skills development in higher education institutions were chosen by students: trainings – 75% of respondents; workshops and master classes – 52,6% each; guest lectures (with invitation of scientists, stakeholders) – 51,3%; development of author's projects to address social issues and seminars – 35,5% each; special courses and traditional lectures with emphasis on the practical relevance of the information presented – 30,3% each; workshops – 28,9%; and 1,3% of respondents consider all of the above forms to be the best.

Among the educational methods, students preferred: group work and teamwork – 59,2% of the surveyed students; training – 53,9%; discussions – 51,3%; case studies – 47,4%; presentation of projects, creative works – 43,4%; self-study – 38,2%; coaching – 32,9%; case study method – 30,%; brainstorming – 30,3%; didactic

games – 27,6%; flipped classroom method – 14,5%; brainstorming – 14,5%; and 1,3% of respondents consider all of the above methods to be the best.

Let's dwell further on the characteristics of a number of innovative methods that aroused the greatest interest among students.

One of the effective ways of forming and training actualized soft skills, to which the surveyed students (75% of respondents) drew attention, is training. As the researchers O. Butylina & Yu. Soroka rightly observes, it is within the training sessions that interested participants are given the opportunity, on the one hand, to obtain the theoretical minimum necessary for understanding the essence and practical application of this or that «soft skill», and on the other hand, a sufficient amount of practice is provided, which can become the basis for the further development of such skills in the course of further professional activity (Butylina, Soroka, 2021).

Researcher C. Koval rightly emphasizes that soft skills can be more thoroughly mastered at trainings on motivation, leadership, management, teamwork, time management, presentations, personal development projects (Koval, 2015).

The use of communication skills training in the educational process (both during academic and extracurricular activities) is also important for the development of soft skills in future social workers. They are aimed at acquiring skills and abilities to establish contact with the interlocutor, perceive and understand the emotional state, receive and transmit non-verbal information, build a conversation correctly, listen and understand the interlocutor; developing the ability to adequately and fully perceive and evaluate oneself and other people, as well as the relationships that have developed between people; mastering the technique of correction and removal of internal barriers that hinder effective pedagogical communication; mastering constructive ways to overcome conflictual pedagogical situations and prevent them; formation of social and perceptual sensitivity, empathy, empathy, reflection, tact as professionally significant qualities of a teacher (Keryk, 2015).

Since soft skills include a whole range of different social skills (the ability to manage one's time, various communication skills: the ability to speak competently, to persuade, to speak publicly, leadership qualities, conflict resolution skills,

flexibility and adaptability) and personal qualities, it is advisable to use a series of trainings to develop them comprehensively.

A series of trainings allows for the gradual development of soft skills, especially time management skills, the ability to self-control and restore social and psychological balance, increases stress resistance, develops leadership qualities, etc.

Recently, practical training – a workshop – has been popular among students (28,9% of respondents).

A workshop is a kind of workshop where experienced social workers share their thoughts and experience on solving a specific social problem, but at the same time, there is an exchange of views and discussions on possible other options for solving social problems on the social issues proposed for discussion.

Researcher O. Kazannikova (Kazannikova, 2020) singles out the main differences of workshop technology from other interactive events: there is no theoretical part, only applied problems are solved; high intensity of group interaction; workshop participants are responsible for finding ideas and making decisions; each participant is an active member of the team and contributes to the joint work his ideas, personal experience, own observations, experiments, etc.; the importance of actual experience and personal experience of each participant; the result of the team's work depends on the degree of participation of each participant, on the level of his independence.

Workshops are excellent for building team interaction and solving problems that students will face in future social work; development of creative and personal qualities that are necessary for a social teacher in his professional activity; as well as to practice communicative, organizational, leadership, diagnostic, projective, didactic, analytical skills; trials in various professional roles in specific social groups.

We would like to emphasize that 27,6% of students interviewed during the survey prefer to carry out educational tasks through game activities. The quest method has proven itself as an innovative method of developing soft skills among students in this spectrum.

In fact, «quest» is a method of game technology, which has a clearly set didactic task, a game design, necessarily has a leader (mentor), clear rules (Sokol, 2014).

An educational quest is a specially organized type of research activity, for the purpose of which students search for information at specified addresses, which includes searching for these addresses or other objects, people, tasks, etc. Tasks can be different in their content and content: creative, active, intellectual.

Quests are divided into the following forms: computer games-quests; web quests (website, blog, virtual dictionary, etc.); QR quests (two-dimensional barcode); media quests (for example, photo and video quests); outdoor quests; combined quests (Kononets, 2012; Sokol, 2014). Note that web quests are becoming more and more popular among students in conditions of distance learning in a higher education institution. This is an innovative resource-oriented educational technology aimed at students' independent search for information necessary to perform a problematic task using Internet resources. At the same time, the web quest as an educational method essentially integrates the elements of project, game, problem-based, group learning, which ensures the most efficient translation of knowledge into social skills.

In general, the introduction of a quest into the educational process in a higher education institution allows: to activate the skills of students' mental activity by creating special conditions for performing tasks in the social sphere of life; to form a stable interest (motivation) of future specialists in social work; to accelerate emotional and intellectual activity and perception of the material through the use of technical means and visual materials (real objects, models, models, images of film fragments, photographs, drawings), conditional graphic signs, symbols, etc. In essence, soft skills quests are based on modelling a life situation that arises or may arise in a particular social group.

Note that the case method, which was preferred by 30,3% of those interviewed during the student survey, is based on real factual material in the field of social work or something close to the real situation in a specific society.

A case is both a type of task and a source of information for its implementation. In the practice of developing social skills, the following types of cases are distinguished: case-case, case-exercise and case-situation. At the same time, a case study is used to quickly discuss a certain situation or illustrate a certain idea. A case study is most often used when quantitative analysis is

required. The case situation requires preliminary independent preparation for a comprehensive analysis of a specific situation and presentation of alternative ways of solving it.

The using of the case method in the educational process of a higher education institution promotes the development of such «soft skills» in future social workers: improvement of communication skills (ability to work with an audience, improvisation); oratory (development of intelligence, public speaking and culture of thinking).

The main stages of the case method are: presentation of the case to students; individual study of the case by each student separately; development by students of individual solutions to case tasks; discussion and debate in the group regarding the individual solutions of the case tasks identified by the students (Kozak, 2015: 155).

The case method involves the integration of individual and team styles of cognitive activity, a creative approach to cognition, a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and deep immersion in the situation. This is a motivational method, a method for students to discover their social skills in terms of prompt and qualitative analysis and critical thinking.

Another innovative method of developing soft skills during the educational process in higher education, which essentially integrates teamwork (preferred by 59,2% of students) and brainstorming (preferred by 30,3% of students) and has gained popularity in the last decade, is brainstorming. This method is preferred by 14,5% of students surveyed.

We emphasize that brainstorming is a method of organizing collective creative activity, which is based on the group and maximum generation of ideas that are presented in a short period of time, discussed (without arguments) and accepted for the prompt solution of an educational task (mostly extraordinary) (Krasnoshchok, Demchenko, Kravtsova, 2023; Toader, Brad, Rujescu, Dumitrescu, Sîrbulescu, Orboi, Gavrilă, 2023).

In fact, it is a mean of creative thinking and communicative attack in society, it develops students' confidence in their own strength and freedom of communication, analytical skills and skills in processing a mass of information in a short period of time. At the same time, the method contributes to the development of students' ability to resolve conflicts, stress resistance skills and purposefulness.

The application of this method for the development of students' social skills has several stages: 1) the teacher offers students to create a certain virtual reality of social work and formulates a social problem, 2) the task to be solved is determined; 3) roles are assigned (participants and moderators are chosen); 4) students are grouped and generate an array of ideas regarding the prompt solution of a social problem (20–30 minutes), the ideas are recorded; 5) presented ideas are discussed (without criticism and encouragement); 6) the most effective and efficient option for solving the task (problem) is selected.

The advantages of this method are: equality of participants in the educational process, visibility through constant fixation of ideas, positive motivation, development of interest in learning.

Project method. 43,4% of surveyed students prefer to develop their own social skills through the means of performing creative works and through the presentation of projects.

The special significance of the project method is that it is a method of practical purposeful action and opens up opportunities for the formation of the student's personal life experience in interaction with the surrounding social environment, develops his skills as a presenter and persuader (Savelchuk, 2019; Toader & Brad & Rujescu & Dumitrescu & Sîrbulescu & Orboi & Gavrilă, 2023). This especially applies to the involvement of future social workers in the development of current social projects aimed at preventing and overcoming social or personal problems of various categories of the population.

Coaching method. The purpose of this method is to teach future social workers to independently master new knowledge, skills and abilities. Coaching differs from classical training and classical counseling in that the coach does not give advice and recommendations, but looks for a solution together with the student. The student interacts with the coach "on equal terms" and solves the projected social task (social problem) much faster and more efficiently (Nezhynska, Tymenko, 2017).

This method is aimed at the development of the following soft skills in future social workers: skills in organizational work, operational work with an array of information, self-confidence, the ability to build an algorithm of actions to provide the necessary social assistance to people.

In general, as evidenced by pedagogical practice, innovative methods are effective if they are not used chaotically, but in an integrated manner.

Conclusion. The material presented allows us to draw the following conclusions. Soft skills are formed in future social workers most effectively in the process of combining academic and extracurricular students in a higher education institution. To increase motivation (interest) and the readiness of soft skills to develop their own, it is advisable to use services for creating blogs, platforms for online learning, for meetings at a convenient time with like-minded and experienced social workers, for a continuous exchange of experience in solving various social problems and acquiring new social skills (Zoom, Wiziq, etc.).

Innovative methods of developing soft skills in future social workers include simulation methods (analysis of specific situations in social groups

and training for finding an optimal and operational solution to a certain social problem), aimed at simulating future social activities, and non-simulation methods aimed at stimulation of cognitive activity, assimilation of professional competences in combination with formation and improvement of social skills, mastering of best practices of social work. At the same time, it should be noted that the use of an integrative system of innovative development of soft skills contribute to the formation of the future social worker as a competitive and creative specialist in the field of social services and social work.

We see the direction of further research in the construction and substantiation of a modern model of development of social soft skills in future social workers in a higher education institution.

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