



DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS IN A COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS

DESENVOLVIMENTO DE HABILIDADES INTERPESSOAIS EM UM AMBIENTE COMPETITIVO: ASPECTOS PSICOLÓGICOS E LEGAIS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore the development of soft skills in a competitive environment, considering psychological and legal aspects, and to define pedagogical conditions for developing legal competence among future professionals.

Method: A combined approach was employed, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, surveys, and legal analysis. Data were collected from experts, psychologists, lawyers, prospective employees, and employers. The study also evaluated legislative frameworks and educational practices.





Results: The study confirmed the vital role of personal and interpersonal soft skills for success in both academic and professional contexts. It highlighted deficiencies in current curricula regarding soft skills training and identified effective strategies like project-based learning, case studies, and interactive exercises. Additionally, the research emphasized the importance of integrating legal competence into professional training through interdisciplinary education and active learning methods.

Conclusion: Soft skills development must be prioritized alongside professional knowledge. Future training should balance individual, pair, and group activities to build communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. Developing legal consciousness and culture is essential for fostering legal competence, promoting responsible and lawful professional conduct.

Keywords: Soft skills; Competitive environment; Professional knowledge; Legal competence; Education; Activities; Law.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Explorar o desenvolvimento de habilidades interpessoais em um ambiente competitivo, considerando os aspectos psicológicos e legais, além de definir as condições pedagógicas para o desenvolvimento da competência jurídica entre futuros profissionais.

Método: Foi adotada uma abordagem combinada, incluindo entrevistas semiestruturadas, grupos focais, aplicação de questionários e análise legislativa. Os dados foram coletados junto a especialistas, psicólogos, advogados, futuros trabalhadores e empregadores. O estudo também analisou marcos legais e práticas educacionais.

Resultados: O estudo confirmou a importância das habilidades interpessoais e pessoais para o sucesso acadêmico e profissional. Apontou deficiências nos currículos quanto ao treinamento de soft skills e identificou estratégias eficazes, como aprendizagem baseada em projetos, estudos de caso e atividades interativas. Além disso, ressaltou a relevância de integrar o desenvolvimento da competência jurídica no ensino profissional, com ênfase na educação interdisciplinar e métodos ativos de aprendizagem.

Conclusão: O desenvolvimento de habilidades interpessoais deve ser priorizado juntamente com o conhecimento técnico-profissional. A formação futura deve equilibrar atividades individuais, em dupla e em grupo para promover a comunicação, a inteligência emocional e a adaptabilidade. A consciência e a cultura jurídicas são essenciais para a formação de competências legais, promovendo uma conduta profissional responsável e pautada pela legalidade.

Palavras-chave: Habilidades interpessoais; Ambiente competitivo; Conhecimento profissional; Competência jurídica; Educação; Atividades; Direito.





1 INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world swept by globalization and internalization in education, soft skills are becoming more critical for business communication, affecting employment opportunities and guaranteeing success in academia and industry. Thus, the development of soft skills, which will only continue to grow in demand, needs to become a priority in vocational training in higher education institutions, where the communication component has great potential.

Given that a primary objective of higher education is to promote the development of professional communication skills, teachers need to be intimately familiar with the expectations placed on young professionals. Accordingly, when shaping the educational process, it is crucial to recognize that today's employers focus not only on a high level of hard skills, which refer to the professionally important specialized technical qualifications of potential employees, but equally on the mastery of soft skills. The latter implies a set of universal inter-professional social skills that determine the effectiveness of labor and academic processes, define the specialist's ability to communicate effectively, and relate to the culture of communication regardless of their field of work.

Our analysis of scientific research on the matter shows a growing interest of theorists and practitioners in the potential of academic disciplines to build soft skills, as demonstrated by S.A. Bazhenova et al.(2024), T.G. Bortnikova and M.I. Dolzhenkova(2024), A.Iu. Bulatetskaya (2024), A.G. Dmitriev et al.(2024), E.L. Emelyanova (2024), V.A. Kolenova(2024), and others.

Nevertheless, the issue of soft skills development has still not been covered comprehensively in Russian methodological research. This testifies to the importance of this methodological aspect in self-learning and lifelong learning and demonstrates that this issue has been developed mainly in the realm of practice, while its theoretical substantiation (especially in the context of Russian higher education) remains underwhelming.





2 METHODS

The research methodology included a combined approach using quantitative and qualitative methods (Dzhancharova et al., 2024; Markova et al., 2018; Vinogradova et al., 2018). Semi-structured interviews with experts, psychologists, and lawyers were conducted to deepen our understanding of the problem. Focus groups were used to evaluate the importance of soft skills and the legal aspects associated with them. The survey method was applied in developing questionnaires to collect statistical data on the perceptions of soft skills by prospective employees and employers. Finally, we analyzed legislation relevant to education and vocational training and assessed the role of public and private initiatives in developing soft skills.

We identified a few key factors affecting the development of soft skills in a competitive environment. The paper provides recommendations for businesses and educational institutions on how to implement effective programs for soft skills development. The proposed approaches present a clear algorithm for the development of soft skills in a competitive environment. An emphasis is placed on practical recommendations to improve the quality of staff training and development.

3 RESULTS

Practice shows that academic qualifications and knowledge limited to a narrow specialty are not enough for the contemporary competitive labor market. Our review of relevant scientific literature suggests that despite their high priority, soft skills are rarely included in curricula and assessment criteria. In this light, classes that implement the communicative approach can be seen as a great resource, as they provide students with the right conditions to successfully master and practice soft skills.

To achieve this goal, teachers need to apply unique techniques when working with their students to foster the skills of working with educational information in their specialty and promote the development of communication skills, abilities, and knowledge. Due attention should be paid to the content of classes and independent assignments and creating favorable conditions for these skills to be developed effectively and naturally.





This work requires a proper approach to developing work programs and carefully planning and organizing the classes in view of students' individual differences, specialization, and group microclimate. Therefore, to optimize the development of soft skills, teachers need to ask and answer themselves three questions: "What soft skills do my students need to develop?", "In what way do students develop soft skills?", and "How could the educational process and learning situation be modeled for students to develop a specific skill?". These questions provide a better understanding of the desired learning outcomes, critical to identify and plan to choose expedient forms and methods of teaching and assessment.

There are various approaches to the understanding and classification of soft skills. In this study, we chose the simplest classification with two large groups of soft skills, which are constantly being narrowed down: personal and interpersonal soft skills.

The category of personal skills includes self-organization and self-motivation (combining a positive attitude and academic skills, initiative, and will-driven persistence); the ability to approach problems with good sense and find the most favorable solution for each situation; determination (implying a balanced approach and forward thinking in decision-making); the ability to work under stress (the ability to allocate time competently, pushing the professional to work for themselves); and flexibility (adaptability, ability to learn, openness to new experiences).

Interpersonal skills refer to communication skills; emotional intelligence; the ability to empathize; the ability to express oneself and be understood; the ability to listen and not just hear; leadership qualities (not so much as the ability to manage, but as the ability to motivate others wisely); teamwork skills; the ability to be convincing and influential during speeches, discussions, and negotiations, thoughtfully looking for the solution that will satisfy all parties; the ability to reach mutual understanding with others.

Among the methodologically sound ways of developing soft skills, we should highlight the organic combination of different forms of learning (individual, paired, group), the balanced combination of speech activities, methods, and exercises to replicate real-life scenarios and professional situations, as well as the proper implementation of self- and peer evaluation of learning achievements and work results.

The forms of work employed in and outside the classroom aim to equip students with interpersonal soft skills, which require work in pairs and small and large





groups. In this process, students need to cooperate, and their independent work has to include an interactive component.

Group work practices create the environment necessary to develop tolerance and inclusion in student groups. These methods facilitate the development of organizational skills and the ability to work together harmoniously and effectively: clearly and soundly express one's viewpoint, convince others and listen to their opinions, reach agreement, compromise, make concessions, listen actively, and speak in turns accounting for the limited time allocated to each participant.

However, it is important to take a calculated approach to forming pairs and groups of students to work together because students tend to prefer working with those people who already belong in their comfort zone in everyday life. Constant regrouping will allow each student to interact with many others, build relationships, and negotiate with people with different temperaments, points of view, behavioral styles, and sociocultural backgrounds.

Teachers should make sure that each student tries different roles and, accordingly, different functions in the group (leader, organizer, moderator, performer, etc.). Furthermore, pair and group work facilitates the development of communication skills and emotional intelligence. By deliberately observing others' behavior and emotions, students become more competent, learning to distinguish different emotions, interpret them correctly, respond to them appropriately, and build communication based on the emotional state of their partner.

Individual forms of classroom work also deserve attention as a promising arena for the development of soft skills, as this work promotes personal transversal abilities (responsibility, organization, creativity, digital and media literacy, etc.). The harmonious development of personal and interpersonal skills can be achieved by balancing different types of work in the classroom (individual, pair, and group). The specifics of every occupation dictate the need for regulatory legal norms concerning the course and result of the technological production process and the interaction of its participants with each other, with the state, and with other spheres of production.

Legal competence can be defined as a system of legal knowledge, convictions, experience, and understanding of the mechanism of law and legal technologies that allow one to navigate the legal field, competently find solutions to problems in the sphere of law, and influence the existing legal and legislative systems. Thus, these components of legal competence stimulate the mechanism of social protection for the





person who needs professional qualities, high specialization in the chosen field, legal culture and literacy, civic maturity, broad erudition, and skills in using modern technology.

On the other hand, legal competence can be understood as a system of industry-specific knowledge of existing legislation, knowledge of the essence of law and its mechanisms, and the ability to think in legal terms, properly apply the obtained legal knowledge in professional practice, and achieve effective results using law.

Nevertheless, legal competence cannot be developed without the specialist having legal consciousness and legal culture. Legal consciousness is a system of views, convictions, and guidelines in the legal sphere, the individual's stance that translates into legal behavior in future professional practice. On the other hand, the legal culture of a future professional can be interpreted as the person's mastery of a complex body of knowledge on current legislation and the ability to use it expediently in the professional legal space. In other words, it is an external manifestation of the specialist's legal behavior.

The structure of legal competence includes the following three components: value-motivational (having an admonition to adhere to legality and lawfulness in professional work and social life; conviction in the necessity of lawful behavior and observance of lawfulness; a sense of responsibility for compliance with legal norms; intolerance of offenses; ability to navigate legislative documents); substantive (understanding and mastery of basic legal concepts and terminology; knowledge of the legal aspects of professional practice and production technology; developed legal thinking; knowledge of the signs and types of illegal actions in the professional sphere; knowledge of legislative norms and requirements relevant to one's occupation); and activity (communication skills, ability to express one's thoughts in an understandable, correct, and logical manner, to argue and discuss; ability to build good relations with colleagues and subordinates in the course of work, having the skills and abilities to use one's legal knowledge in professional practice).

The pedagogical conditions necessary in this context include: the focus of education and upbringing on developing legal consciousness and legal culture among future specialists; integration of legal knowledge with disciplines in the humanities cycle; saturating the education and upbringing process of vocational education with active methods of learning legal content.





To consider the outlined conditions in more detail, the first one, i.e., the focus of education and upbringing on developing legal consciousness and legal culture in future specialists, is the leading aspect in the legal education of university students who are preparing to take full responsibility for all their actions, as their legal consciousness and legal culture will give them an understanding of the fundamentals of constitutional, administrative, labor, and other branches of law. The second pedagogical condition, the integration of legal knowledge with humanities, is the foundation of legal competence because it coordinates the educational process with the changes in the legislative space that create a democratic and legal state. Integration processes are recognized as the means enabling interdisciplinary links.

4 DISCUSSION

The reliability of the presented approaches is supported by the fact that the most effective methodological tools for building soft skills are the project method and case studies. These methods involve interactive tasks (identifying the object and discussing possible solutions to the problem, finding and collecting materials, analyzing information, and discussing financial reporting methods). Soft skills are naturally developed through direct communication, which requires teachers to introduce elements of discussion and debates and use approaches that, having problem-based communication at their core, foster the ability to cooperate, express oneself clearly and persuasively, listen actively, form one's viewpoint, and work together, learning from each other.

Among other effective methods are role modeling and simulation games (Filonova et al., 2024; Potekhina et al., 2024; Voskovskaya et al., 2022). In role modeling, students interact in pairs and groups following predetermined scenarios, acting according to their specific role. Simulation games, on the other hand, immerse students in approximated conditions of real-life sociocultural, economic, and legal processes, phenomena, mechanisms, and procedures, equipping them with the necessary knowledge through practice.

Furthermore, this work significantly improves digital skills and media literacy. For example, when asked to prepare a speech or presentation, students are encouraged to seek information and learn from various sources critically and





comparatively. Developing these skills can strengthen creative and critical thinking and promote compassion. Finally, the assigned essay topics may touch upon current social and legal problems, inviting students to propose solutions to them, which have a positive impact on skills in dealing with controversial situations as a citizen and a humane person.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The research supports the importance of developing students' personal and interpersonal soft skills. Several recommendations have been formulated detailing the means of developing these skills in vocational training through individual, pair, and group work with a balanced combination and appropriate content of various activities. Among promising directions for further research, we propose investigating the role and place of soft skills in theoretical training and comparative assessment of the effectiveness of different teaching and assessment methods with an emphasis on soft skills.

We examined the process through which future specialists develop legal competence and identified the pedagogical conditions required for it and the criteria and levels of legal competence. Finally, we concluded that the professional competence of a future specialist is an integrated personality structure that combines professional knowledge in the industry, practical skills and abilities in solving industry-specific tasks, and personal qualities pertinent to professional practice.

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