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Nilufar Karimova

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Ph.D. student

lily_ielte@mail.ru

PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE DISCIPLINE IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS OF STUDENTS

Abstract: *The article focuses on the problem of soft skill development in higher education discussing the reasons that engendered the need for social skills in modern workplace. In order to prepare professionals that can meet the demands of modern marketplace the author explores the pedagogic potential of the “Foreign language” as a separate discipline.*

Key words: *social competence, soft skills, professional skills, teaching foreign languages, higher education, pedagogic potential.*

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Introduction

The development of modern society in dynamic pace, changes in world education characterized by the tendency to create a unified educational space, the change of generations, and along with the needs of the subjects of education, has served as an impetus to the reform of higher education system in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Changes are being reflected in new laws of the country concerned on educational system. Including Uzbekistan's Development Strategy for 2017-2021 implies the development and implementation of modern teaching methodologies in general educational institutions to improve radically the quality of education. This direction is very comprehensive and introduces the new state standards of education on the basis of consistency, continuity and competence approach. It should be noted that at present, in higher education system it is being planned to develop a new generation of textbooks and teaching materials to improve the teaching of general subjects and to improve state educational standards. As a part of this process, a point-rating system for assessing the quality of education is being implemented, modules of the main educational programs are being developed, and the competency-based teaching model is used as

the methodological basis for the content of modern higher education. These changes are designed to improve the quality of higher professional education and, as a consequence, the competitiveness of graduates of Uzbek higher education in the world labor market.

Recent international studies show that possession of professional skills alone is no longer sufficient for employees in the highly competitive marketplace of the 21st century (Lazarus, 2013). The need for individual soft skills has taken on heightened importance (Seetha, 2014). The occurrence of the current need is explained in the following way:

- *Integration of modern communication technology into the workplace.* The new world is a place where technology is constantly improving and influencing change in the workplace (Connell, Gough, McDonnell, & Burgess, 2014). Specifically, this movement accelerates the displacement of workers by machines that can perform tasks faster, more accurately and 24/7. While technology enables business owners to reduce overhead by downsizing their workforce, individuals whose skill sets are now obsolete have limited options for employment if their current jobs are eliminated;

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- *Increased cultural diversity within the workforce as a result of globalization.* Because of globalization process in the political, economic and social life all over the world, as well as the rapid development of international collaboration, participation in international and professional projects with foreign specialists the new world includes diverse work groups. Accordingly, members of these groups have to interact globally with different cultures. It made critical for employees to have interpersonal and intercultural communication skills to work with and understand team members.

- *Age diversity in the workplace.* Today's professionals are working longer than their predecessors. Studies show that the average workplace is now made up of four generations. There is a combination of individuals from multiple age groups including individuals near to retirement (Bailey, 2014). One of the main concerns for employers is that it's hard to manage a team that ranges from the ages of 16-60. Everyone is at such different stages in their life and career and this means they'll all have different wants and needs when it comes to work.

Generational changes have resulted in the increased demand for soft skills (Bailly, & Lene, 2013). As the main goal of higher education to prepare professionals that perform effectively in their workplaces it has to focus not only their academic skills but also, social competence that is often referred as soft skills. The most valuable employees in the organization have a mix of both hard and soft skill competence (Griffith & Hoppner, 2013).

It should be noted that foreign language courses owns a great potential in this respect. Many methodologists (Zimnyaya & Passov etc.) note educational potential of the discipline "[Foreign language]". Discipline "Foreign Language", in our opinion, has sufficient pedagogical potential to form students' social skills. Below we are going to highlight three aspects in the potential of this discipline.

The potential of the course "Foreign Language" for the formation of students' social skills is, firstly, connected with the essence of the phenomenon of "language". As Makhkamova G. notes, "A foreign language is a socio-historical product, which reflects the history of the people, culture, the system of social relations, traditions". Without the use of language, it is impossible to achieve complete interpersonal interaction, and the process of learning languages, having a pronounced social context, is unique compared to the study of other disciplines.

Secondly, in our opinion, the potential of the discipline "Foreign Language" lies in the content of the language material. In the process of learning foreign languages, students should get acquainted with speech clichés (greetings, thanks, apologies, requests, requests, etc.) and their equivalents in a foreign language, knowledge of which is necessary

with interpersonal communication and without which it is impossible to be socially competent. In classes of a foreign language, students must be familiar with the formulas of social etiquette and norms of behavior in a variety of situations. By reading and listening dialogues, polylogues, texts, watching videos given in the national character, mentality of the target language students learn about how to behave with foreigners. Composing dialogues and polylogues on various topics, participating in role-playing games in a foreign language lesson, students model various life situations of interpersonal communication that require following certain norms of behavior (conversation of a boss with a subordinate, a parent with a child, a seller with a buyer, a waiter with a visitor, two colleagues in a formal setting, talking friends, etc.). The abstractness of the discipline "Foreign Language" allows a teacher to select educational texts on a wide variety of topics. So, in the process of studying the sections "My future profession", "Relationships" and others, reading and discussing literary texts in a foreign language about the various relationships between people and the conflicts that arise between them, serves as a positive or negative example of interpersonal communication, contributing to the formation of social competence.

Thirdly, the pedagogical potential of the course "Foreign Language" for the formation of students' soft skills lies in the possibility of using social forms of learning (working in micro groups, groups, collective forms of training). When applying collective and group forms of training (stage plays, role-playing games, group projects, brainstorming sessions, debates, discussions, trainings, etc.) there is an exchange of views in a foreign language, various positions are highlighted, and the potential and activity of each student and the entire group (class) is realized. Working in micro groups can be implemented in classes in a foreign language through the preparation of dialogues and colloques. In the preparation of dialogical statements, students are to take adequate actions when communicating with a speech partner: to speak logically, clearly express their thoughts. Through this they form skills of logical presentation of one's opinion, belief, perception of a different point of view, distinguishing between facts and opinions. Students learn to find the appropriate tone of communication with different interlocutors in different situations, develop a large repertoire of role-playing behavior (role plasticity), learn to analyze difficult situations that arise when people interact, understand the logic of their development, and distinguish the goals of participants in the communicative situation, predict the consequences of their behavior. When applying social forms of teaching in foreign language classes students make additions, corrections to each other's speeches, share experiences, identify a problem, find optimal solutions to it, which helps to shape the skills of constructive interaction, exchange of information,

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self-regulation and self-control, forecasting and conflict resolution.

Thus, the pedagogical potential of the discipline “Foreign language” for the formation of students’ soft skills is great and significantly superior comparing

other disciplines. However, effective realization of this potential, in our opinion, can only be achieved if the teacher of a foreign language is purposefully prepared to form these competencies.

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