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## SOFT SKILLS FORMATION OF FUTURE ATHLETES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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**Abstract.** The article presents the main aspects of theoretical and experimental study of the conditions for the "soft skills" formation of future athletes and physical education teachers in higher education institution. The content and features of the "soft skills" formation of a professional are revealed. The place of "soft skills" in the professional structure of the athlete and teacher personality and the role in the implementation of professional activities is determined.

Complex multi-level solution of problems; critical thinking; creativity; people management; cooperation with others; emotional intelligence; judgment and decision making; customer orientation; ability to negotiate; cognitive flexibility; stress resistance; effective job search have been chosen for criteria of "soft skills" formation of university students majoring in physical culture and sports. Levels of formation of "soft skills" are ranked according to the degree of manifestation into initial, low, medium and high.

With the help of these indicators, the conditions for the effective "soft skills" formation of modern students in the field of physical education and sport of higher education institutions are experimentally tested.

It is recommended to supplement part of the educational components of the professional training of the educational program with topics that will contribute to the formation of "soft skills". It is important to target students to participate in soft skills training, and also to bring up the need for self-improvement as soft skills are crucial for graduates in employment and career development in the context of globalization.

**Keywords:** soft skills, professional training, athlete, professional activity, teacher of physical culture, physical education and sports, educational components. professional activity.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "soft skills" are personal qualities that allow you to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people [21]. For a modern employee, they contribute to be successful regardless of the specifics and areas of activity [4, 5, 8, 13, 25]. As early as the middle of the last century, P. Whitmore defined the concept of "soft skills" as "skills that are associated with work and actions that affect people in the first place" [30].

The concept of "soft skills" has been theoretically and practically studied by domestic and foreign scientists. Most researchers agree that in training, in addition to professional knowledge

which is the gaining of "hard skills", students need "soft skills" that allow them to communicate effectively and interact with others [6, 17]. «Soft skills are those sought out behaviors and characteristics that employees demonstrate unconsciously and routinely on the job» [18].

Noteworthy is the analysis of soft skills formation methods and their role in future professional activities for specialists in various industries, for example, engineers [3, 7, 11, 16], builders [2], medical workers [19, 23], military [9], social workers [1, 20], philologists and foreign language teachers [14] et al. "There are many publications on the importance of athletes "soft skills", but mainly for elite sports, that is Olympic sport and for coaches [29]. In our research we studied the particularity of "soft skills" formation of future athletes, physical education and sports disciplines teachers.

After all, "one of the important tasks of higher education is the training of competent future physical education teachers, capable of quality performance of professional functions and social role in modern conditions and being creatively improved as a specialist and personality." [26, p.203].

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Our study concerned the place of soft skills in the university training of future athletes and physical education teachers. The methodological and theoretical basis of the study consists of theoretical (analysis, systematization, generalization, classification of scientific literature materials on the indicated problems) and empirical methods (observation, testing, comparison, measurement, pedagogical experiment, development of electronic teaching tools).

The study took place within three stages. The first stage included the analysis of the essence of hard and soft skills related to the training of specialists in sports.

The second stage included the experimental part. In order to find out the level of soft skills formation of future specialists, the author's questionnaire was created, with the help of which 152 students of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports were interviewed. The questionnaire results were processed.

At the third stage, conclusions were drawn from the results of the questionnaire and suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the soft skills formation of future sports professionals were offered. Specific recommendations were worked out to improve the content of educational training of future athletes and physical education teachers.

## **3. RESEARCH RESULTS**

According to Shapovalova, "physical education, sports and human health, a healthy lifestyle, self-growth, both personal and professional are the areas of professional activity of a specialist in physical education. This implies the necessary amount of knowledge, skills, specific professional and personality traits, attitude to future professional activity, which is the key to high results of professional activity." [26, p.203]. Athletes have a good physical training scheme, possess the theoretical knowledge necessary for work, and at the same time, there is underdeveloped level of skills such as solving complex problems, critical thinking, creativity, interaction with others, managing people, emotional intelligence, which is often impossible to obtain after the end of a sports career, fruitful coaching, opening own business and achieving success in life. To do this, one need to study all life, regardless of the employment sector.

When organizing the professional training in higher education institutions (HEI), it is important to distinguish between the concepts of "knowledge", and "skills" of an individual. Knowledge is information about objective reality recorded in a person's memory and consciously

accepted; while skills are the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/skill>). "That such dimensions of performance as learning, innovation and enterprises can be enhanced by placing greater emphasis on developing soft skills within the education and training processes" [18].

The main objective of future specialists training in physical education and sports is "the training of specialists capable of solving complex specialized tasks and practical problems, characterized by the complexity and uncertainty of conditions during professional activities in the field of physical education and sports or in the learning process" [28, p.5]. Moreover, among the general competencies that a student should acquire, the following ones are highlighted: the ability to work in a team, to plan and manage time, to communicate in the state language both verbally and in writing and similarly to communicate in a foreign language; to be critical and self-critical, to act on the basis of ethical considerations (motives); the skills of interpersonal interaction, the use of information and communication technologies.

The key learning outcomes of future athletes, physical education and sports disciplines teachers, in addition to subject knowledge, should be:

1) cognitive abilities and skills of the subject, which include the abilities and skills of abstract and concrete thinking, the ability to work creatively and effectively; presentation skills of scientific and practical material; modern technology skills in future professional activities;

2) practical subject skills, such as: skills to work with athletes and students of different age, the ability to use professional and substantive knowledge and practical skills on basic and professional disciplines in the processes of obtaining and processing information, its practical use in professional activities;

3) general skills, in particular: self-learning ability and continuing professional development; the ability to organize own activities; effective time-management skills; pedagogical communication skills, including oral and written communication in the mother tongue and one of the common world languages; interaction skills with other people, the ability to work in teams of professionals of various fields; the ability to take the individual characteristics of students into account in the organization of the educational process.

To assess the level of "soft skills" formation the following criteria are suggested:

C1 -complex multi-level problem solving (readiness to find a way out of difficult social and pedagogical situations in one's daily practical activity, to respond instantly and solve problems);

C2- critical thinking (specialist's willingness to think scientifically, that is, consciously, independently, grounded, based on facts, and not only on available information, introspection, purposefulness, self-organization);

C3 - creativity (initiative, ability to search for new solutions and the use of non-standard methods and original means in solving professional problems);

C4 - people management (effective communication, successful social interaction, ability to adapt to the general momentary mood, lack of hard planning, sensitivity to problems of group members, special attention to weak people, creating conditions for revealing of creative potential and maximum achievements among people around, the ability to use situational moments for professional purposes arising in the process of interaction);

C5 - cooperation with others (readiness to work in a team, establish contacts, carry out effective social adaptation, ability to cooperate with others on various levels within the framework of achieving a specific goal, partnership);

C6 - emotional intelligence (the ability to understand and control emotions, motivation, intentions, both personal and others);

C7 - judgments and decision-making (the formation of one's own opinion and courage in

making independent decisions and their consequences),

C8 - customer focus (interaction with the environment and solving people's problems based on understanding of their values and needs, in particular students);

C9 - ability to negotiate (convincing presentation of one's position through verbal and non-verbal techniques, taking the specifics and interests of the other side into account, the ability for long-term cooperation);

C10 - cognitive flexibility (quick switching from one thought to another, as well as thinking over several ideas and tasks at the same time);

C11 - stress resistance (the ability to withstand stressful influences or cope with many stressful situations by actively transforming them or adapting to them without harm to our health and the quality of the activities performed);

C12 - effective job search (the ability to apply various methods to implement the optimal combination of the needs of employers, trends in the development of the professional field and own skills and goals).

Each criterion expresses the highest level of development of the future specialist's "soft skills". With its help the degree of conformity of the revealed level of formation of skill is established.

The levels according to the degree of skill formation were ranked (Table 1):

LEVEL NAME	DEGREE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT	CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR
<b>L1 (initial)</b>	incompetent	demonstrates rarely or does not demonstrate at all, does not understand the importance of competence, does not try to apply it and develop
<b>L2 (low)</b>	below the expected level	limited competence possession, in the form of individual elements; manifests it only in simple or familiar situations
<b>L3 (average)</b>	availability of expected experience	successfully uses competence to solve standard work tasks; in new or non-standard situations - in fragments; clearly understands the essence of competence, demonstrates it, consciously monitors the behavioral manifestations of competence in his/her behavior and others
<b>L4 (high)</b>	skilled	confident competence possession, showing it both in standard, and in new, difficult situations, helps other people show it effectively

*Tab. 1. Levels of «soft skills» formation*

To establish the level of formation of each component of "soft skills" of future professionals in physical education and sports, a comprehensive methodology "Self-assessment of key competencies" was used which was developed by the competence laboratory Soft skills Career Center of the Southern Federal University [27]. With the help of a test adapted for our case, we assessed the level of the competencies development of the respondents.

Students assessed the compliance of the proposed provisions, which allowed to determine the level of implementation of the relevant criteria:

C1: "I have enough information to draw conclusions and solve problems", "I will turn the problem into a problem that helps to solve the situation quickly", "I take into account when solving the problem information that is not directly related to it, but influences it", "I purposefully expand

the area of my professional knowledge in related fields", "I use different approaches in analyzing the problem, including interdisciplinary".

C2: "I test my ideas about the world, beliefs and ideas", "When I am told that something is impossible", I start looking for ways to overcome limitations", "I change my ideas and beliefs if there are good reasons for it", "I check the authenticity of new information in different ways", "Most often my mistakes in solving problems are related to the rigidity of ideas and attitudes."

C3: "I unknowingly limit the search for solutions to proven options", "I offer several solutions at once", "People often emphasize my creative approach to solving problems", "I gather a base of unique ideas, predictions of the future and discoveries from different fields", "I practice exercises to develop a creative approach to solving problems in different areas."

C4: "I try to do all the work myself, without handing over tasks to others", "Colleagues accept developmental feedback from me", "I inspire others to achieve an overall result", "People I work with get from me timely support on work issues", "I initiate team forms of solving local problems".

C5: "It is difficult for me to link the achievement of team goals and personal interests", "When there is a dispute with others, I am a person who draws everyone's attention to common interests", "I seek specific help from others if I can not solve the problem", "I take an active part in the joint search for solutions to team problems", "I clearly understand my role in team problem solving".

C6: "When communicating with people, I pay attention not only to what they say, but also how they behave", "I find it difficult to predict how others will react to my words or actions", "Understanding the causes of emotions helps me interact constructively with aggressive people", "People around me confirm that I understand their emotions and states".

C7: "I purposefully form techniques that help me make decisions", "I cope with the consequences of decisions", "I monitor the consequences of their actions and draw conclusions about their effectiveness", "I am guided in decision-making by clear internal guidelines and values", "I rely on the advice of others when making decisions that affect me personally".

C8: "People around me turn to me for real help in different life situations", "I clarify my ideas about the interests and hobbies of others", "My actions help others better understand their interests and needs", "I gather information to understand than I can be useful to others", "I do more than what is required of me in a formal relationship to please others and thus create a good mood for myself"

C9: "I manage to reach an agreement with others that suits both parties, regardless of their status and the degree of our acquaintance", "I seek in the negotiations the best conditions for myself in all possible ways", "I build long-term cooperation in negotiations", "I give the opportunity to save face to the other party in the dispute".

C10: "It is easy for me to consciously move from one meaningful topic of communication to another", "I find arguments in defense of different from my point of view", "I openly accept the reasoned picture of the world, even if it does not agree with mine".

C11: "Without help, I turn a problem into a problem that helps solve the situation quickly", "When I am told that something is impossible", "I start looking for ways to overcome limitations", "I use self-regulation techniques to keep working at high cognitive and emotional load / in stressful situations", "I do not immediately start solving the problem again after a failed attempt, I need time to come to my senses".

C12: "I purposefully expand the circle of professional communication", "I train to present my skills and competencies in writing and orally", "I participate in projects that develop my skills and give me the opportunity to express myself in the professional sphere", "I formulate for self-professional and career goals", "I use different sources to know and understand the needs of employers in general and specific companies in particular".

The answers to the suggested questions were given on the following scale: 1 point, if the proposed question-statement does not fully correspond to the views and skills of the subject; 2

points if the question-statement does not answer; 3 points if it is difficult to answer; 4 points, when the question-statement is rather answered; 5 points, if the question-statement fully corresponds to the beliefs of the student. So for each criterion the respondent could score from 5 to 25 points.

The level of competence development according to the criterion was determined from the total number of points scored on the following scale, obtained by the method of expert assessments (Table 2):

Level of formation	L1	L2	L3	L4
Number of points scored	$t \leq 14$	$15 \leq t \leq 20$	$21 \leq t \leq 23$	$t \geq 24$

Tab. 2. Levels of development of competence

The obtained test results are shown in Table 3 and visualized in the diagram (Figure 1)

Indicators	Levels of formation							
	L1		L2		L3		L4	
	number of persons	%	number of persons	%	number of persons	%	number of persons	%
C1	42	27,63	45	29,61	47	30,92	18	11,84
C2	49	32,24	38	25,00	42	27,63	23	15,13
C3	26	17,11	32	21,05	65	42,76	29	19,08
C4	36	23,68	21	13,82	57	37,50	38	25,00
C5	41	26,97	38	25,00	40	26,32	33	21,71
C6	39	25,66	40	26,32	51	33,55	22	14,47
C7	33	21,71	49	32,24	33	21,71	37	24,34
C8	36	23,68	48	31,58	44	28,95	24	15,79
C9	41	26,97	16	10,53	60	39,47	35	23,03
C10	40	26,32	26	17,11	51	33,55	35	23,03
C11	30	19,74	43	28,29	46	30,26	33	21,71
C12	34	22,37	40	26,32	52	34,21	26	17,11

Tab. 3. The level of "soft skills" formation of future specialists in physical education and sports

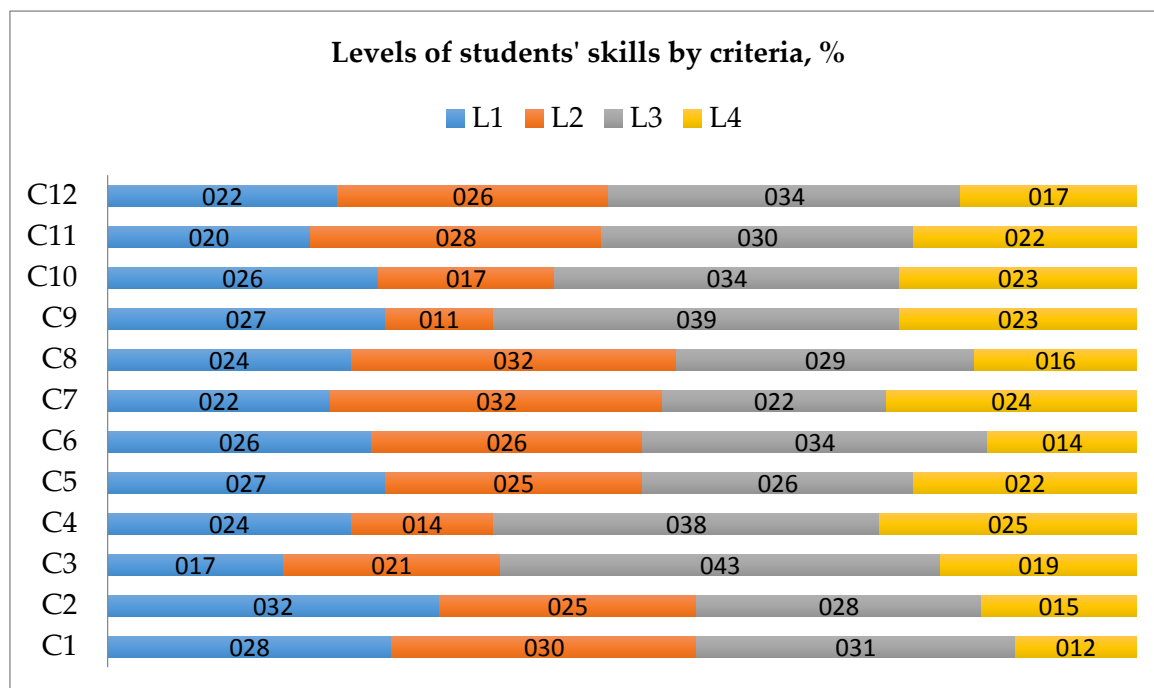


Fig.1. Initial levels of "soft skills" in future specialists in physical education and sports

With the help of a test adapted to our audience, the current level of development of the competencies of the surveyed students was assessed. The lowest manifestation of soft skills is observed from 17.11% according to criterion C3 (creativity) to 32.24% according to criterion C2 (critical thinking). The low level was found from 10.53% according to criterion C9 (ability to negotiate) to 32.24% according to criterion C7 (judgment and decision-making). At the average level, there are signs of soft skills from 21.71% according to C7 (judgment and decision-making) to 42.76% according to C3 (creativity). The lowest level of skills was found by criterion C1 (complex multilevel problem solving) - 11.84%, and the highest - by criterion C4 (human management) - 25%. Summarizing the results, it was concluded that future specialists in physical education and sports do not have sufficient skills of critical thinking, it is difficult for them to make decisions, especially in the case of complex multi-level problems.

As Karimova states, "to improve the degree of employability of Higher Education graduates requires educators to develop students' not only academic knowledge or "hard skills", but also transversal or "soft skills" in order to make them worthy of the demands of modern work labor. In its turn, it requires to revise the curriculum and syllabuses in Higher Education " [14, p.1916].

Therefore, educational programs for Bachelor's and Master's degrees in "Physical Culture and Sports" Faculty and programs in academic disciplines were analyzed. They, from our point of view, can promote the consolidation of soft skills, namely: Fundamentals of pedagogical skills of physical education teachers; Management of of the Field of Physical Education; Fundamentals of the theory and methodology of sports training; Peculiarities of professional pedagogical activity of a teacher-coach of different kinds of sports; Organization and methodology of health-improving physical culture; Methodology of conducting health classes with different groups of the population; Theory and methodology of physical education; Theory and methodology of teaching sports games; Methodology of educational of sports and group work; Olympic and professional sports; Psychology of sport. The following training courses should be supplied with the suggested topics: "Working with Information", "Management of Attention", "Methods of Theory of Implementing of Creative Tasks", "Development and Decision Making", "Critical Thinking Algorithms", "Conflict Management", "Interpersonal Understanding", "Teamwork and cooperation", "Leadership and management", "Self-development management skills". We also propose selective courses "Fundamentals of Decision Theory", "Stress Management", "Self-Organization Skills", Leadership and Team Building", "Critical Thinking".

A. Schreiber [24] proposes to form "soft skills" in students of HEI through a system of additional professional education in the form of a set of disciplines for intensive development of business communication, time management, strategic planning, project work and documentation. Therefore, students should be encouraged to participate in self-development trainings. After students attended some of the suggested trainings, a control check was performed according to the same method. It was established that the indicators of the level of formation of "soft skills" in future specialists in physical education and sports have increased. In particular, the number of students who belong to the high level in terms of integrated multilevel problem solving increased from 9.21% - to 21.05%, and the number of students with the initial level decreased by half - from 27.63% to 13.82%.

The number of students who belong to the high level of critical thinking increased by 12.5% (compared to 15.13%), and with the initial level decreased by 14.97% (compared to 32.24%), the number of people with low level decreased by 9.21% and is 15.79% (compared to 25%), and with the average level of formation - increased by 11.68% and is 39.31% (compared to 27.63%).

The number of students at the high level of judgment and decision-making increased by 10.53% (compared to 24.34%), and the number of students with the initial level decreased by 14.47% and amounted to 5.24% (compared to 21.71%), while the number of people with a low level decreased

by 15.79% and is 26.45% (compared to 32.24%), and with an average level of formation - increased by 11.73% and is 33, 44% (compared to 21.71%).

The experiment provided an opportunity to form students' motivation for self-improvement, increased the level of their "soft skills".

According to T. Ilyina and N. Kryuchkova [12], "soft skills" are the competencies of the future, because in the context of globalization, they are crucial for graduates during their employment and career development. Therefore, the development of soft skills of university students is extremely important.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The study of publications of both domestic and foreign scientists on the topic of our scientific research, their systematic analysis is the main goal of our study to assess the level of soft skills of future professionals in the field of physical education and sport.

It has been researched that the proposed additions of professional disciplines which included the topics concerning the development of critical thinking, communication and information skills, decision-making methods contribute much to better development of soft skills.

Surveys of students majoring in "Physical Culture and Sports" show that they have a tendency to develop "soft skills". At the same time, future specialists in physical education and sports are aware that significant formation of "soft skills" occurs in the process of self-improvement, striving for new knowledge, using all opportunities for self-development, motivating oneself and others, taking the experience of others into account.

However, we are convinced that further research on the effective implementation of soft skills directly into the professionals' activities in the field of physical education and sports and the impact of this process on the professional growth will also deserves scholars' attention.

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Проведено теоретичне та експериментальне дослідження умов формування «м'яких навичок» майбутніх спортсменів і вчителів фізичної культури у закладі вищої освіти. Розкрито зміст та особливості формування «м'яких навичок» фахівця-професіонала. Визначено місце «м'яких навичок» у професійній структурі особистості спортсмена і викладача та роль у здійсненні фахової діяльності. За критерії сформованості «м'яких навичок» у студентів університету спеціальності «Фізична культура і спорт» обрано: комплексне багаторівневе розв'язання проблем; критичне мислення; креативність; управління людьми; співпрацю з іншими; емоційний інтелект; судження і прийняття рішень; клієнтоорієнтованість; вміння вести переговори; когнітивна гнучкість; стресостійкість; ефективний пошук роботи. Рівні сформованості «м'яких навичок» проранжовано за ступенем виявлення на початковий, низький, середній і високий. З допомогою цих показників експериментально перевірено умови для ефективного формування «м'яких навичок» сучасних студентів у сфері фізичного виховання та спорту закладів вищої освіти. Рекомендовано освітні компоненти професійної підготовки освітньої програми доповнити темами, які сприятимуть формуванню «м'яких навичок». Обґрунтовано важливість орієнтувати студентів на участь у тренінгах з «м'яких навичок», а також виховувати у них потребу самовдосконалення, оскільки «м'які навички» є вирішальними для випускників у працевлаштуванні та розвитку кар'єри в умовах глобалізації.

**Ключові слова:** «м'які навички», професійна підготовка, спортсмен, професійна діяльність, учитель фізичної культури, фізичне виховання і спорт, освітні компоненти.