

**Halitsan Olha**

*PhD in Pedagogy (Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences), Associate Professor,  
Associate Professor at the Department of Pedagogy  
State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”,  
Odesa, Ukraine*

E-mail: Halitsan.OA@pdpu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2542-649X>  
Scopus: 57219142476

**Chernenko Nataliia**

*Doctor of Sciences (in Pedagogy), Professor,  
Professor at the Department of Educational Management and Public Administration  
State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”,  
Odesa, Ukraine*

E-mail: chernenkonatali@pdpu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2288-8824>

**Muzychenko Ganna**

*Doctor of Sciences (in Politics), Professor,  
Professor at the Department of Political Science and Law  
State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”,  
Odesa, Ukraine*

E-mail: muzychenko@pdpu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7890-9615>  
Researcher ID: I-5214-2018  
Scopus: 57222067231

**Chernykh Volodymyr**

*PhD in Pedagogy (Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences), Associate Professor,  
Associate Professor at the Department of Applied Mathematics and Informatics  
State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”,  
Odesa, Ukraine*

E-mail: garafmalen@pdpu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6176-1899>

**Palshkova Iryna**

*Doctor of Sciences (in Pedagogy),  
Professor at the Department of Pedagogical Technologies of Primary Education  
State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”,  
Odesa, Ukraine*

E-mail: Palshkova.IO@pdpu.edu.ua  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6710-5232>

**Soft skills as drivers of resilience:  
pedagogical strategies and the Ushynsky University case  
in overcoming social challenges**

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*The study highlights key pedagogical strategies for modernizing the social mission of an innovative higher education institution – the South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky (Odesa, Ukraine) (hereinafter Ushynsky University). The research concept was formulated based on participation in the project 101129315-TURBO-Erasmus-EDU-2023-CBHE. A practical (methodological) case of Ushynsky University is presented, demonstrating ways of addressing contemporary social crises through the development of students' soft skills. The analysis focuses on pedagogical strategies employed by the University in shaping soft skills of future teachers as drivers of resilience, thereby reinforcing the social mission of higher education.*

*Ushynsky University is represented as an agent of social transformation, implementing the “third mission” of higher education – establishing proportional interaction with the non-academic environment through*

*the strengthening of socio-emotional content. The study is grounded in the analysis of sociocultural, civic-determined, and educational contexts that define the role of universities in society. Emphasis is placed on the need to reconsider the meta-goals of academic activity in light of social challenges driven by economic, societal, and humanitarian crises. Vectors of modernization of didactic, developmental-supportive, and content-functional parameters of the University's educational space are characterized, ensuring optimal integration of socio-emotional elements and subject-methodological orientation in teacher training.*

*The role of socio-emotional skills of modern professionals is specified in terms of adaptability and resilience in overcoming social crises. It is established that a contemporary university must ensure the development of future teachers' ability to adapt rapidly, make decisions under conditions of high uncertainty, and thus be prepared to address social disruptions. Ushynsky University is shown to construct optimal conditions for students' development and self-development of critical and reflective thinking, acquisition of infomedia and media literacy, emotional and cultural intelligence, cross-cultural and social competence in the sphere of interpersonal communication and interaction – significant for fostering partnership among all social actors.*

*The research is based on the principles of a person-centered and activity-oriented methodological approach, which reveals methodological and content-implementation vectors of innovating the university's educational space through enhanced socio-emotionality. Within this approach, the analysis of Ushynsky University's practical case is elaborated, demonstrating the role of universities in designing and disseminating social innovations. The study also incorporates principles of integrative methodology, analyzing innovative educational practices and transdisciplinary approaches to constructing the educational space of higher education institutions with an accentuated social component. Methods of theoretical and empirical inquiry include systematization of information from scholarly sources, content analysis of teacher training programs, and expert evaluation.*

*The research concept is grounded in the understanding that universities act as catalysts of change, constructing innovative models and implementing pedagogical strategies for preparing future teachers capable of designing models of social communication in a multidimensional social space; applying the full functionality of artificial intelligence and specialized tools for storing, processing, and analyzing large datasets; relying on creative and divergent thinking, technological literacy in professional activity; demonstrating flexibility and adaptability in uncertain social conditions; and activating empathetic intentions, leadership qualities, teamwork aspirations, and social self-determination.*

*The effectiveness of implementing interactive formats of constructing the educational space – such as “master classes” for lecturers and “workshops” for students – is substantiated, as they accurately reflect modes of interpersonal interaction within the university's pedagogical system. An experimental program and methodological recommendations were developed, strengthening the focus on students' socio-emotional skills as markers of their ability to function under social uncertainty. The program received positive evaluation from scholars and practitioners during an online focus group: 67% of participants assessed the prospects of implementation positively; 30% suggested additional clarifications to methodological materials; and 3% expressed the need for further refinement of program content elements.*

**Keywords:** *hard skills, discipline-specific abilities, soft skills, transversal competences of modern teacher, transversal supra-professional abilities, universities, youth, social challenges, fostering youth soft skills, interactive forms of work, “master class” for teachers, “workshop” for students, practical case at Ushynsky University, pedagogical strategies, socio-emotional skills of young people, ability to overcome social crises, drivers of resilience.*

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**Introduction.** In developed countries, universities play a pivotal role by reproducing two traditional missions – teaching and research. The teaching mission involves the preparation of highly qualified specialists competent across diverse fields of knowledge. The research mission, in turn, reflects the capacity of the academic environment to generate new knowledge and to conduct both fundamental and socially significant studies. Contemporary societal transformations necessitate attention to the so-called “third mission”, which emphasizes engagement with non-academic stakeholders, including communities, businesses, society, and industry. This third mission ensures the transfer of knowledge and advanced technologies into the cultural, social, and civic domains of the nation, while also addressing the challenge of involving experts from various fields in tackling global economic, ecological, and social issues at the national level. Within the framework of Ukrainian universities, the reproduction of this third mission highlights the pressing issue of their ability to withstand social crises, particularly through the development of youth soft skills.

**Formulation of the problem.** Contemporary universities are increasingly subject to societal criticism for prioritizing “hard” skills – namely professional and technical competencies – in the training of specialists. Consequently, soft skills are perceived as receiving insufficient attention, and their development among students

is not considered a priority. In recent years, leading universities in the country have begun to integrate the issue of soft skills into the content of educational programs, aiming to meet the demands of the labor market. At the same time, the cultivation of soft skills within traditional educational frameworks remains highly challenging. This underscores the need for the design of specialized methodological programs, tools, and forms of student engagement that effectively foster the development of soft skills.

The relevance of the research is manifested in the fact that the problem of forming the ability to communicate, critical thinking, variable situation analysis, emotional intelligence and creativity is timely in the modern changing world. A modern specialist can act in a social crisis only by combining hard skills and soft skills. Soft skills of young people determine successful personal and career growth, therefore they are a promising direction for overcoming social crises in the modern world. The activities of universities are decisive in the formation of soft skills of young people, in particular their potential for developing interaction skills, critical analysis of events, creativity, mediation, flexibility and empathy of future professionals. The components of the “soft skills” of modern highly qualified specialists are as follows: professional communication, critical thinking, teamwork; lifelong learning; entrepreneurship skills, leadership, awareness of ethical responsibility, ability to work in a multidisciplinary team, ability to operate in a multicultural space.

This study pursues three interconnected objectives:

1. To represent Ushynsky University as an agent of social transformation that embodies the “third mission” – the harmonization of societal demands with the formation of socially active and creative youth.
2. Analyze modern approaches to the interpretation of concepts “hard skills” (professional, discipline-specific abilities), “soft skills” (transversal, supra-professional abilities, socio-emotional) of the specialist in modern scientific and pedagogical discourse.
3. Map the current landscape of application of special methods for the formation of socio-emotional skills and transversal competences of students at Ushynsky University.
4. Generate experimental program and guidelines for higher-education institutions, which will increase the focus on socio-emotional skills of young people, as a factor in their ability to overcome social crises.

*Methods. Research & Methodology.* The study was conducted using methods of scientific-pedagogical inquiry and experimental research: systematic literature review, policy and programme content analysis, expert validation.

**1. Systematic Literature Review.** Articles in scientific periodicals were analyzed. The scientific positions of leading scientists in the field of education, pedagogy and methods of professional and pedagogical education of future teachers were systematized. Additionally, structured search, which was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science for the period 2022–2025 using the keywords “transversal competences”, “soft skills”, and “teacher” was carried out.

**2. Policy and Programme Content Analysis.** Effective forms of work with students that positively influence the formation of their socio-emotional skills and transversal competences have been analyzed. An experimental program for students and guidelines for teachers of Ushynsky University have been developed, which contribute to the formation of socio-emotional skills of future teachers.

**3. Expert Validation.** Preliminary findings and recommendations were shared with a panel of 60 experts during an online focus group. Feedback was incorporated to refine interpretations, particularly regarding the metrics of the program’s effectiveness.

**Literature review.** In recent years, the concept of “soft skills” (a supra-professional characteristic) in scientific and pedagogical discourse has predominantly been contrasted with the notion of “hard skills” (a professionally determined characteristic). Scholars generally employ the term “soft skills” to denote the socio-emotional dimension of professional activity, referring in particular to emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, resilience, and personal creativity.

The scholars J. B. Noah and A. B. Aziz analyzed existing definitions of soft skills in contemporary sources and described approaches to their development among university students (Noah & Aziz, 2020).

Researchers R. Arocena and J. Sutz presented soft skills in the context of social innovations implemented by universities to promote global sustainable development (Arocena & Sutz, 2021).

We are aligned with the perspective of M. Cinque, who refers to soft skills as non-cognitive skills (Cinque, 2021), as well as with K. Mwita and N. Mwilongo, who demonstrated the correlation between students acquired soft skills and their academic performance (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2024).

We adopt the perspective of M. Freel, A. Persaud, and T. Chamberlin, who described the role of universities in addressing social crises, particularly through the actualization of academic values and ideals. In their study, the scholars demonstrated that universities engaged in the “third mission” foster the development of students’ soft skills, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the labor market (Freel, Persaud, & Chamberlin, 2019).

In the research of S. Macqual and U. Mohd Salleh, we find a comprehensive description of a specialized program designed to ensure the formation of soft skills among future teachers. The scholars proved that the implementation of such a program serves as an effective mechanism for promoting students' creativity, divergent thinking, and autonomous reasoning (Macqual & Mohd Salleh, 2021).

Researchers S. Succi and M. Canovi described soft skills as factors enhancing graduates' employability competitiveness and conducted a comparison of students' and employers' perceptions of their role (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

**The main part.** An analysis of scientific sources published in international journals demonstrates a convergence in the understanding of researchers and practitioners regarding the essence of soft skills in the profile of a modern specialist. These skills encompass individual manifestations of human abilities in communication, interaction, empathy, cultural intelligence, cross-cultural openness, tolerance, digital adequacy, emotional resilience, receptiveness to innovation, self-awareness, and related attributes. The challenge in developing soft skills lies in the fact that these personal characteristics are difficult to measure, require long-term influence, and are highly dependent on the social context. Consequently, the issue arises of achieving balance in the formation of hard and soft skills among university students, as well as determining the methods and extent to which such content should be incorporated into educational training programs.

Among the so-called “soft skills” in modern requirements for teacher professionalism, the ability to use artificial intelligence and big data, technological literacy, creative thinking, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability, analytical thinking, leadership and social influence, motivation and self-awareness, empathy and active listening ability.

The issue of youth soft skills development is currently associated with the formation of transversal competencies (Halitsan & Palamariuk, 2023). Transversal competencies acquire fundamental importance in the preparation of future teachers, whose professional abilities under contemporary conditions must be universal, standardized, and cross-cutting.

The transversal competences of a modern teacher are characterized by the following features: integral interdisciplinary and territorial transferability; ability to form both in the professional and personal environment; dependence on social and interpersonal relationships; cross-culturality and cross-functionality in learning; possibility of development in blended learning; active communicative and interactive nature; significance for the implementation of the “Life-long learning” system.

Therefore, to overcome social challenges, future specialists must acquire the ability to adapt quickly, make decisions in situations of high uncertainty, and create optimal conditions for the development and self-development of students' critical and reflective thinking, the acquisition of informational and media literacy, emotional and cultural intelligence, and competence in interpersonal communication and interaction, which is significant for ensuring partnership interaction between all subjects of the educational process.

We are convinced that the professionalism of a teacher must take into account not only subject-based competences or “hard skills” (professional, discipline-specific abilities) but also “soft skills” (transversal, supra-professional abilities). Teacher's soft skills are described as extra-professional, individually generated characteristics that enhance the effectiveness of pedagogical activity; as a set of non-specialized (non-discipline-specific) skills that activate cognitive and intellectual activity as well as emotional intelligence. It is argued that soft skills develop and improve throughout life in accordance with diverse professional contexts and accumulated teaching experience. Flexible soft skills of teachers are presented as a complex socio-cultural and professional-pedagogical phenomenon determined by the integrity, comprehensiveness, and unity of education with the teacher's personal pedagogical experience.

Analysis of the educational components of the training programs for future teachers at Ushynsky University has shown the priority of two types of interactive forms of work: a “master class” for teachers and a “workshop” for students, which most accurately reflect the methods of interpersonal interaction in the educational environment of the university. A master class for teachers is an innovative, effective and practice-oriented form of broadcasting and transferring knowledge and skills, exchanging professional and specialist experience, the main goal of which is to demonstrate innovative and original methods (technologies, models, programs and algorithms) of mastering specific content under the condition of active involvement and “inclusion” of all participants.

A workshop for students is an intensive form of educational work, during which participants (students) acquire the so-called “procedural knowledge” and practical skills due to their own activity and motivational “involvement”. The specificity of conducting workshops at Ushynsky University is the minimization of students' theoretical awareness and their acquisition of the so-called “dynamic” knowledge (awareness), which can be applied according to the “here and now” algorithm. Within the framework of workshops, learning occurs by

obtaining relevant professional (in particular, pedagogical) experience and personal experience, which is much easier to perceive in group interaction. The dominant forms of pedagogical support in learning are mentoring, guidance and advising.

The first stage of the program – “Transversal competences of a teacher in the perspective of rethinking the methodology for constructing the country’s educational space” – provides the following master classes for teachers: “Multiplicative integration of transversal competences of a teacher – a way to update the universal design of the educational environment of the New Ukrainian School”; “Educational and scientific foundation for modeling the concept of forming transversal competences of a future teacher at Ushynsky University”; “Functional-technological and variational-implementation practices for ensuring the formation of transversal competences of future teachers in the educational environment of Ushynsky University”.

Within the framework of the stage, the following workshops are offered for students: “Transversal competences of a modern teacher in the coordinates of interdisciplinary research”; “Transversal competences of a modern teacher: thesaurus, modus, praxis”; “Soft-skills and meta-skills of a modern school teacher in the dimensions of the paradigm of transversal competences”.

Within the framework of the second stage of the program – “Readiness of a teacher to model the multicultural educational environment of the New Ukrainian school as a transversal competency” – it is proposed to hold the following master classes for teachers: “Clarification of the global cross-border thinking of a modern school teacher as an invariant of transversal intercultural competence”; “Multicultural transversal competence of a teacher in the dimensions of the paradigm of the Dialogue of Cultures”.

At this stage, the following workshops are offered for students: “Intercultural transversal competence of a modern teacher – a way to preserve the culturally creative national code of Ukrainian identity in a globalized transcultural world”; “Transversal intercultural competence as a mechanism of metacommunication in a globalized educational and scientific environment”.

The third stage of the program “Readiness of a modern teacher for virtualization and digitalization of teaching and upbringing technologies as a transversal competence” provides master classes for teachers: “Productive innovative educational technologies in the challenges of a modern globalized society”; “Innovation of the educational space of Ushynsky University: thesaurus and definitions, functionality and pragmaticon”. The following workshops are offered for students: “Communicative and strategic innovative thinking of a modern teacher as a category of the problem-phenomenological field of virtualization and digitalization of educational technologies”; “Manual, functionality and potential for extrapolating the virtual dimension into the plane of professional activity of a teacher of a modern school”; “Readiness for congruent use by a teacher of a virtual digital learning platform as a transversal competence”; “Strategy and tactics of using the functionality of distance learning platforms in the synergy of the educational, scientific and socio-cultural space of the country”.

Preliminary results and recommendations were submitted for review by a panel of 60 experts – 35 lecturers from the State Institution “South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky”, 10 specialists from the South Ukrainian Center for Professional Development of Managers and Specialists in the Socioeconomic Sphere (Odesa, Ukraine), and 15 experts of public organizations – within the framework of an online focus group. The panel’s feedback contributed to the refinement of interpretations, with particular emphasis on clarifying and validating the metrics used to assess the effectiveness of the developed program.

The draft program was elaborated by experts and received a favorable assessment from academics and practitioners. 67% of focus group participants positively assessed the prospects for the program’s implementation; 30% of respondents suggested additional specifications for the methodological material; 3% of experts expressed their opinion on the need to refine the content elements of the program and its additional verification.

**Conclusions.** Higher education institutions assume a strategic function in fostering students’ soft skills, providing an environment conducive to the enhancement of their adaptability and resilience in addressing social crises.

At Ushynsky University, work on the formation of socio-emotional skills and transversal competences of future teachers is carried out systematically, comprehensively and consistently.

Ushynsky University ensure student participation in project and training work, team work, and contribute to the creation of a creative environment where everyone can demonstrate their abilities. In the informal atmosphere of student communication, habits are formed and the ability to find common interests and compromises is formed, teamwork skills are developed and the leadership qualities of each participant are revealed.

At the university, students develop the ability to analyze information, assess its reliability and formulate well-founded conclusions. This allows you to develop critical thinking and the ability to solve professional problems.

While studying at the university, students practice time management skills – the ability to effectively allocate their time, plan tasks and complete them on time.

An effective means of developing students' soft skills at the universities is mentoring, coaching and advising. Experienced teachers help students navigate the professional environment, develop leadership skills and build a network of professional contacts.

The soft skills of students at the university are also formed thanks to the support of innovation and creativity: encouraging students to participate in innovative projects, startups and scientific research. This contributes to the development of their creativity, initiative and ability for innovative thinking.

Future research directions in this field are envisaged in the design of an integrated student course program aimed at fostering theoretical understanding of the nature of soft skills alongside practical readiness for their advancement.

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## **М'які навички як драйвери резильєнтності: педагогічні стратегії та практичний кейс Університету Ушинського в подоланні соціальних викликів**

**Галицян Ольга Анатоліївна**

кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент,  
доцент кафедри педагогіки

*Державного закладу «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет  
імені К. Д. Ушинського», Одеса, Україна*

**Черненко Наталія Миколаївна**

доктор педагогічних наук, професор,

професор кафедри освітнього менеджменту та публічного управління

*Державного закладу «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет  
імені К. Д. Ушинського», Одеса, Україна*

**Музиченко Ганна В'ячеславівна**  
доктор політичних наук, професор,  
професор кафедри політичних наук і права  
Державного закладу «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет  
імені К. Д. Ушинського», Одеса, Україна

**Черних Володимир Володимирович**  
кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент,  
доцент кафедри прикладної математики та інформатики  
Державного закладу «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет  
імені К. Д. Ушинського», Одеса, Україна

**Пальшкова Ірина Олександрівна**  
доктор педагогічних наук,  
професор кафедри педагогічних технологій початкового навчання  
Державного закладу «Південноукраїнський національний педагогічний університет  
імені К. Д. Ушинського», Одеса, Україна

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У дослідженні висвітлено ключові педагогічні стратегії модернізації соціальної місії інноваційного закладу вищої освіти – Південноукраїнського національного педагогічного університету імені К. Д. Ушинського (Одеса, Україна) (далі – Університет Ушинського). Концепцію дослідження сформульовано за результатами участі у проєкті 101129315-TURBO-Erasmus-EDU-2023-CBHE.

Репрезентовано практичний (методичний) кейс Університету Ушинського з подолання сучасної соціальної кризи шляхом розвитку soft skills студентів. Представлено аналіз педагогічних стратегій, якими керується Університет у формуванні soft skills майбутніх учителів, як драйвера резильєнтності, для реалізації соціальної місії вищої освіти.

Університет Ушинського репрезентовано в дослідженні як агента соціальної трансформації, що реалізує «третю місію» – встановлення співмірної взаємодії з позаакадемічним середовищем, шляхом употужнення соціоемоційного контенту. Дослідження базується на аналізі соціокультурних, прогромадсько детермінованих і освітніх контекстів, що формують роль університетів у суспільстві. Акцентовано на необхідності переосмислення метамети академічної діяльності університетів з урахуванням соціальних викликів, зумовлених економічними, суспільними та гуманітарними кризами. Охарактеризовано вектори осучаснення дидактичних, розвивально-підтримувальних, змістово-функційних параметрів освітнього простору Університету Ушинського, що забезпечує оптимум інтегрування елементів соціоемоціоніки та предметно-методичної спрямованості в підготовці майбутніх учителів.

Специфіковано роль соціоемоційних навичок сучасного фахівця в розрізі його адаптивності та резильєнтності в подоланні соціальних криз. Встановлено, що сучасний університет має забезпечити розвиток здатності майбутніх учителів швидко адаптуватися, ухвалювати рішення в ситуаціях високого ступеня невизначеності, що забезпечує готовність долати соціальні деформації.

Установлено, що Університет Ушинського конструє оптимальні умови для розвитку й саморозвитку у студентів критичного й рефлексійного мислення, набуття інфомедійної та медіаосвітньої грамотності, емоційного й культурного інтелекту, крос-культурної та соціальної компетентності у площині міжособистісної комунікації і взаємодії, що є значущим для забезпечення партнерської взаємодії всіх суб'єктів соціуму.

Дослідження ґрунтується на принципах особистісно-діяльнісного методологічного підходу, що розкриває методичний і реалізаційно-змістовий вектори інноватизації освітнього простору університету на засадах уяскравленої соціоемоціоніки. У межах названого підходу удокладнено результати аналізу практичного кейса Університету Ушинського, що демонструє роль університетів у розробленні та популяризації соціальних інновацій.

У дослідженні також ураховано принципи інтегративної методології, у межах якої проаналізовано інноваційні освітні практики, трансдисциплінарні підходи до конструювання освітнього простору закладу вищої освіти з актуалізованим соціальним компонентом.

У дослідженні використано такі методи науково-теоретичного й емпіричного пошуку, як: систематизація інформації, що представлена в наукових джерелах, контент-аналіз програм підготовки майбутніх учителів, експертне оцінювання.

Концепція дослідження базується на тому, що університети реалізують функцію каталізаторів змін, конструюючи інноваційні моделі та впроваджуючи педагогічні стратегії підготовки майбутніх учителів, які здатні конструювати моделі соціальної комунікації в багатовимірному соціальному просторі; застосовувати весь функціонал штучного інтелекту та спеціальних інструментів для зберігання, обробки й аналізу великих масивів даних; спиратись на сформоване креативне та дивергентне мислення, технологічну грамотність у професійній діяльності; бути гнучкими й адаптивними в роботі в невизначених соціальних умовах; активізувати емпатійні інтенції та лідерські якості, прагнення працювати в команді та соціальну самодетермінованість.

Доведено ефективність упровадження інтерактивних форм конструювання освітнього простору, як-от: майстер-клас для викладачів і воркшоп для студентів, які максимально точно віддзеркалюють способи міжособистісної взаємодії в педагогічній системі університету.

Розроблено експериментальну програму та методичні рекомендації, що посилюють фокус уваги до соціоемоційних навичок студентів, як маркерів їхньої здатності працювати в умовах соціальної невизначеності. Проєкт програми отримав позитивну оцінку від науковців і практиків під час фокус-груп онлайн. 67% учасників фокус-групи позитивно оцінили перспективи впровадження програми; 30% респондентів запропонували додаткові уточнення до методичних матеріалів; 3% експертів висловили думку щодо необхідності доопрацювання змістових елементів програми.

**Ключові слова:** жорсткі (професійно детерміновані) навички, м'які навички людини (soft skills), трансверсальні компетентності сучасного вчителя, університет, заклад вищої освіти, здобувачі освіти, освітній простір, розвиток м'яких навичок молоді, інтерактивні форми роботи, майстер-клас для викладачів, воркшоп для студентів, практичний кейс Університету Ушинського, педагогічні стратегії, соціоемоційні навички студентів, здатність долати соціальні виклики, драйвери результативності.



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