LINGUISTIC DISCIPLINE «RUSSIAN AS FOREIGN» AND THE FORMATION OF «SOFT SKILLS» AMONG BSUIR STUDENTS

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The article reveals the essence of the concept of "soft skills" and its history, defining features and value for the career growth of a future IT-specialist. A set of key modern skills based on data from foreign and Belarusian sources is presented. The role of the discipline "Russian as a foreign language", studied by non-Belarusian students of BSUIR, in the formation of the basic necessary "soft skills" is shown.

Keywords: education, competences, engineering, future career, soft skills, hard skills, communication, foreign students, Russian as foreign.

Engineering is one of the fastest growing and most exciting fields today. No doubt, successful developers and researchers in the field of engineering should be educated, and at the same time must be able to learn very fast, be extremely motivated, be able to get information quickly. What's more, the first useful tip for a future engineer states: "besides the proper educational background and relevant technical experience, you will need to demonstrate many so-called "soft skills" in order to advance your engineering career" [1].

The origin of the term "soft skills" is as follows: it appeared in the late 1960's in the US military, as the army noticed that for proper working of the system, people need specific skills which were not connected with using machines, but with the social abilities to lead groups, motivate soldiers, supervising office personnel, preparing maintenance reports etc. The interest to this field lead to more detailed investigation of this skills and in 1972 the formal usage of the term "soft skills" was included in the US Army manual [2]. Later experts formulated a series of new tentative definitions, but in this article we will focus on the difference between hard skills and soft skills for a future developer.

For the future career engineer needs both the pack of "hard skills" and "soft skills", they are usually defined as similar concepts or complements. "Hard skills" are the skills necessary for career employment, they can be quantifiable and measurable from an educational background, work experience or through interview. The examples of this skills are: 1) Knowledge of a particular programming language (Python, C# etc.); 2) Cloud Computing; 3) Analytical Reasoning; 4) Artificial Intelligence; 5) Blockchain etc.

"Soft skills" are not as specific, they can be used in every aspect of people's lives. They include time-management, interpersonal adaptability to different people, problems and situations, leadership and general communication skills. The list of basic "soft skills" includes from 10 to 15 positions and varies from one research to another. It is proved that 92% of executives believe soft skills are just as important as "hard skills" and 89% of managers find it extremely difficult to find an employee with the required level of "soft skills" [3].

The interest in "soft skills" has increased over the course of the years. The more researches are conducted, the more people understand the relevance of this concept. According to the investigation of LinkedIn Learning [4], the 5 top skills in demand for 2020 were: 1) Creativity; 2) Persuasion; 3) Collaboration; 4) Adaptability; 5) Emotional Intelligence. According to this research, "soft skills" are gaining in importance with the development of artificial intelligence. It seems that they will remain the only thing that robots will never learn.

Because of their rising importance, the need to teach "soft skills" has become a major concern for educators all over the world. While "hard skills" can be learned studying from a book or from individual training, soft skills needs a combination of environment and other people to be mastered [5].

Below it is described how the work of the Department of General Education of BSUIR helps to contribute to the development of the top "soft skills" in what concerns the discipline "Russian as foreign". This course is taught to the non-Belarusian students of BSUIR, helping them to improve the knowledge of Russian. Basic level Russian-speaking students (e.g. from the eastern part of the Commonwealth of Independent States) note that the course differs significantly from the traditional teaching of Russian at school, where spelling and punctuation are mainly studied. This is due to the challenges of the time and the specifics of training a modern specialist in the field of computer engineering.

In opinion of S. Atroshchenkov, teamlead in EPAM, "soft skill matrix as a pyramid. Its foundation is the basic skills that any engineer should have… " [6]. According to him, that basic foundation is: 1) the ability to listen to others; 2) the ability to ask questions; 3) the ability to conduct business correspondence; 4) the ability to manage your own emotions; 5) the ability to plan your working hours. The specified set largely overlaps with the purely linguistic competencies that a foreign student who is studying Russian at the level of professional proficiency should possess.

Since 2019 at BSUIR exists the curriculum "Russian as a foreign language", created by the author of this article. The document largely takes into account the needs of the future engineer in the formation. In addition to practicing communication skills in various social roles, throughout the entire study of the discipline in 1-4 years, special topics are provided that are aimed at mastering in Russian the necessary set of soft skills (Table 1).

Table 1 – The correlation between individual sections and topics of the course curriculum "Russian as a foreign" and key "soft skills"

Term	Topics studied in BSUIR when learning the course "Russian as foreign"	LinkedIn key "soft skills"	EPAM key "soft skills"
2,7,8	The expression of argumentation, polemics, doubts, beliefs, consent, disagreement, denial, references to sources of information within the framework of discussion	Persuasion, Adaptability, Collaboration	The ability to listen to others; The ability to ask questions
3	The concept of communicative intention. Some speech acts (expression of consolation, justification, promises, etc.)	Persuasion, Collaboration	
4,5,6	Official business style of the Russian language. The concept of a document, their types, composition and language	Collaboration	Business correspondence

6	Verbal behavior when expressing emotions. Means of speech presentation and lexical base for interaction when expressing some emotions (joy, indignation, resentment, etc.)	Adaptability, Emotional Intelligence	Ability to manage your own emotions

As for creativity and time management skills, they are connected with the research work of students. Particularly, in 2017, a section "Belarusian and Russian languages" was created for a scientific conference of BSUIR students, which was later renamed in "Functioning of the Russian and Belarusian languages in the context of informatization of society". The section continues its annual work (Table 2). Preparing for a conference in small groups, defending projects contributes to the development of analytical thinking, interpersonal communication skills, and the culture of polemics. For many Russian-speaking students the conference is almost the first situation with need to communicate with foreigners on scientific topics. This is extremely important for a developer when working in international companies. Moreover, the skills of interethnic and interracial communication are being formed, since most of the students speaking at the section are foreigners presenting their project in Russian, which requires increased attention, tolerance to each other, and a friendly atmosphere. In this, students are assisted by teachers who know the specifics of intercultural communication.

Table 2 – Statistics on the research work of students of the Department of General Education

Year, type of activity	BSUIR Annual Students Conference (№ of participants / reports)	Republican and International conferences in other educational establishments	Republican competition of scientific works of students
2017	6/6	1/1	–
2018	7/5	–	–
2019	42/30	5 reports	2 projects honored with 3rd category
2020	119 / 82	7 reports	2 projects (in progress)

The picture outlined in this report shows that more demands are being made on IT professionals. So, to be in demand in the future, it is necessary to start developing "soft skills" right now. We are sure that with insight into what companies need today, our university, at least in what concerns field of our Department – export of educational services to foreigners, – provides everything to cultivate the essential "soft skills" and "hard skills" of future engineers, developers and researchers.
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ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКАЯ ДИСЦИПЛИНА «РУССКИЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ИНОСТРАННЫЙ» И ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ «SOFT SKILLS» У СТУДЕНТОВ БГУИР

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В статье раскрывается суть понятия «soft skills», или «гибких / мягких навыков», и его история, определяются их особенности и значение для карьерного роста будущего IT-специалиста. Представлен набор ключевых современных «soft skills» по данным зарубежных и белорусских источников. Показана роль дисциплины «Русский язык как иностранный», изучаемой студентами БГУИР, приехавшими из-за рубежа, в формировании базовых необходимых «soft skills».

Ключевые слова: образование, компетенции, инженерия, будущая карьера, soft skills, hard skills, общение, иностранные студенты, русский язык как иностранный.