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CHAPTER 47

The Potential of New Ukrainian School in Forming Students' Social Skills

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Abstract The article considers the problem of forming students' social skills in conditions of prolonged social restrictions caused by military actions and the spread of distance learning. The potential of the New Ukrainian School (hereinafter referred to as the NUS) as an educational environment for the restoration and development of social skills through the formation of key competencies, the organization of cooperation and active interaction of participants in the educational process is substantiated. The main problems of forming social skills of students are identified and the practical possibilities and tools of the NUS for overcoming them are outlined. Particular attention is focused on modern educational technologies and formats of learning that contribute to the development of communication, cooperation, mutual support and social competence of students. The expediency of using the potential of the NUS to compensate for social losses and create conditions for the full socialization of students is noted.

Keywords *New Ukrainian school, communication, social skills, social competence, key competencies, distance learning*

Introduction

Over the past six years, the organization of the educational process in Ukraine has undergone significant changes. Under the influence of external circumstances, such as quarantine, war, forced displacement of some children, traditional education has been replaced by interruptions of the educational process and constant uncertainty. In response to such challenges, the administrations of educational institutions were forced to change the forms of educational activity, switch to distance or blended learning, find new ways to communicate, in particular through messengers, online resources. Accordingly, such changes could not but affect the socialization of students.

The formation of social skills of students is one of the key tasks of modern education, since it is they who ensure the ability of an individual to effectively interact with other people, constructively resolve conflicts, express their own

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opinion, understand the emotions and needs of others, work in a team and adapt to changes. In modern conditions, the importance of social skills is growing significantly.

The social competence of students can also be affected by the lack or limitation of live communication, in particular, the development of communication skills, difficulties in group and interpersonal interaction, which impair the ability to work in a team. Excessive online presence can also complicate the development of non-verbal communication and emotional intelligence.

In such conditions, there is a need to find resources and opportunities to compensate for such losses, solve the problem of reducing social skills through available educational tools.

It is important to note that the concept of "reducing social skills of students", used in the article, is considered as a characteristic of a problematic situation, which is manifested in the complication of socialization conditions, the deficit of direct interaction and the risk of uneven socio-emotional development of schoolchildren.

Since the "New Ukrainian School" reform (hereinafter - NUS) is focused precisely on the formation of key competencies and the development of "soft skills", we see the solution to the problem of the decline in social skills precisely through its tools, in particular, the formation of social skills within certain key competencies and the use of new educational technologies and learning formats.

Therefore, **the purpose of our article** is to identify problems in the formation of social skills of students and search for practical tools to solve such challenges.

1 Current trends in the study of students' social skills.

In modern scientific literature, social skills are increasingly considered in conjunction with the broader concept of social and emotional skills. In the OECD research framework (Study on Social and Emotional Skills), proposed by M. Kankaraš and J. Suarez-Alvarez (2019), social and emotional skills are defined as individual characteristics that manifest themselves through stable patterns of thinking, emotions and behavior, which can develop under the influence of experience and the social environment. The authors identify five interrelated areas:

task performance, emotional regulation, interaction with others, openness to new things and cooperation [8;9].

In Ukrainian pedagogical science, the problem of social and emotional learning and the development of soft skills is also actively researched. L. Hrynevych and co-authors (2021) consider the possibilities of implementing socio-emotional learning within the framework of the "New Ukrainian School" reform, focusing on its compliance with the competency-based paradigm of modern education [7].

L. Hasanova (2024) in her analysis of the above problem defines socio-emotional learning (SEN) as an important practice for developing 21st century skills and links it with the tasks of the National School of Ukraine, the development of emotional intelligence and the formation of socially significant competencies [6].

O. Elkin, O. Rasskazova, V. Hrynko and O. Marushchenko (2024) emphasize the importance of socio-emotional learning for personal development, resilience and socio-emotional competence of students. The authors emphasize that in Ukrainian conditions, interest in socio-emotional learning is largely due to social challenges and the need to support children and teachers in conditions of instability [4].

It is also advisable to correlate the concept of social skills with the concept of "soft skills", since in Ukrainian pedagogical literature they are often used to denote a set of universal skills necessary for effective interaction and adaptation.

Z. Vozna (2023), exploring the possibilities of the "Civic Education" course,

proves the significant didactic potential of the content for the formation of soft skills of high school students. The author proves that communication, cooperation, argumentation, interaction and other universal skills can be formed directly in the process of subject learning, although individual characteristics, in particular leadership, time management and flexibility, require additional targeted work [16].

O. Protas, I. Forostyuk and O. Deshchenko (2025) analyze interactive technologies, project and blended learning, coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer interaction, interdisciplinary work and service learning as modern approaches to the development of soft skills. Although the research mainly concerns higher education, the proposed approaches have methodological value for the school level as well, as

they are based on active interaction, cooperation, reflection and practical activity [12].

The importance of developing soft skills in younger schoolchildren is separately substantiated by A. Synytsia and O. Voyedilova (2025). The researchers link their development with the implementation of the NUS concept and emphasize the possibilities of activity-based learning, in particular physical education, for the development of communication, cooperation, self-regulation, emotional stability and other socially significant competencies [15].

2 Problematic issues of forming students' social skills in the context of modern challenges.

The problem of forming students' social skills in modern conditions cannot be considered outside of the general transformations of children's social experience. School is traditionally one of the key environments of socialization, in which a child gains experience of interaction with peers and adults, learns to cooperate, negotiate, follow rules, resolve conflicts, argue his own position, share another point of view, provide and receive support. A prolonged violation of the usual conditions of social interaction changes the possibilities of acquiring such experience. The child's socialization environment itself is transformed: some of the direct contacts are replaced by digital interaction, the composition of the student body changes, stable friendly and family ties are disrupted, and social interaction takes place against a background of increased uncertainty.

The results of the research indicate an uneven dynamics of socio-emotional characteristics and a significant transformation of the conditions for their formation under the influence of war, distance learning, forced displacement and weakening of social ties [8;14].

The analysis of empirical data on changes in the life and educational experience of Ukrainian children indicates possible problems in the development of their social skills. The relevant trends are reflected in the National Report on the results of the international study OECD SSES (Study on Social and Emotional Skills; hereinafter – DoSEN), prepared by the State Service for the Quality of Education of Ukraine.

According to DoSEN, among 15-year-old Ukrainian students, 84.0% of respondents had experience of distance learning. Accordingly, the number of direct situations of communication, joint activities, non-verbal interaction and spontaneous resolution of interpersonal disputes was smaller (State Service for the Quality of Education of Ukraine, 2024) [10].

The following data indicate the experience of changing the family environment: 55.4% of respondents have a father or mother (guardian) fighting in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 16.0% have lost a loved one as a result of the war, and 23.1% have experienced a deterioration in their health. 15.4% of students have experienced moving to another country, 14.7% to another region, 14.4% to another settlement, and 16.1% have changed their residence within the settlement. These data may indicate a possible complication of socialization and the development of socio-emotional skills [10].

Analysis of the study by B. Badanta et al. (2024) showed that the impact of war on Ukrainian children and adolescents covers physical, mental, and social well-being. Thus, the social aspect of the consequences of war should be considered together with the psychological and educational aspects [1].

According to the OECD SSES 2023, Ukrainian 15-year-old students on average demonstrated lower levels of achievement motivation, trust, optimism, energy, and assertiveness compared to 10-year-olds. At the same time, 15-year-olds had higher levels of empathy, tolerance, responsibility, creativity, and curiosity. No statistically significant age differences were recorded for sociability, stress tolerance, and perseverance [14].

Research on modern challenges and the transformation of children's social experience shows that the problem of forming students' social skills requires rethinking approaches to the social development of schoolchildren. It is exacerbated by factors such as: reduced opportunities for direct communication, the consequences of distance learning, digitalization of interaction, instability of the social environment, forced changes in life circumstances, and insufficient systematic practice of social behavior.

Among the possible manifestations of the problem of forming social skills, the following can be distinguished: a decrease in the level of emotional intelligence, problems in non-verbal communication through the practice of screen communication and in chats; difficulties in resolving conflicts due to the virtualization of communication; increased anxiety before public speaking or personal conversations “live” and in real time; problems during teamwork.

Thus, a modern Ukrainian school in the face of social challenges should consider social skills not as a secondary result of the educational process, but as an integral part of competency-based learning.

Confirmation of the relevance of the development of social skills are the results of a five-year experiment on the implementation of the program of social-emotional and ethical learning, hereinafter referred to as SEEL. According to these results, 56% of students had a positive attitude towards the implementation of SEEL, 64% reported that they use the practices of the program outside of lessons, and 67% identified emotion management skills among the most important skills, the development of which they owe to participation in the program. Such data are an indicator of the subjective significance of social-emotional and ethical learning for students. In addition, 64% of parents indicated that they viewed the program as additional support for their child in the context of full-scale war, and 59% identified the development of emotion management skills as one of the most valuable aspects of the program [17].

The results of Ukrainian studies are consistent with the international evidence base. J. Durlak, R. Weissberg, A. Dymnicki, R. Taylor, and K. Schellinger (2011) conducted a scientific analysis that covered 213 school programs and 270,034 students, demonstrating the positive impact of universal social-emotional learning programs on social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance [3]. However, it is worth noting that the Ukrainian context requires the adaptation of such programs to the conditions of war, distance learning, and the different social experiences of children.

3 Using NUS tools to form students' social skills.

In the context of the above problem, NUS has significant potential to support the social development of students. Competency and activity approaches, partnership pedagogy, group and project activities, formative assessment and socio-emotional learning create opportunities for the systematic practice of communication, cooperation, self-regulation and mutual support.

In particular, M. Shkabarina considers the formation of “soft skills” in primary school students in the NUS environment. Among the key skills, communication, cooperation, critical thinking, creativity and responsibility are highlighted. The study emphasizes that such skills are not formed within the framework of one subject, but require a systematic organization of educational activities. The author also analyzes specific methods that can be used: project activities, group work, reflection, debates, sketchnotes, SCAMPER, creating comics, design thinking, Fishbone and KWL. The scientist considers them as means of practical formation of soft skills, which are combined with the idea of NUS as an environment where social skills are not simply explained, but practiced through joint activities and interaction. She also cites the results of a survey of 237 primary school teachers, which showed a high demand for communication skills (89%), critical thinking (84%) and emotional intelligence (76%), which further confirms the need for systematic development of students' socio-emotional skills in the modern educational environment [13].

The generalization of scientific research allows us to distinguish three main groups of approaches to the implementation of socio-emotional learning: school-wide approaches aimed at forming a positive psychological climate, a culture of mutual respect, trust, cooperation and involving students in the life of the educational institution; universal programs that are implemented mainly within the educational process and cover the entire class; targeted or specialized programs focused on students who have increased social or emotional needs and require additional support.

Such work should be integrated into the daily organization of the educational process, the nature of teacher-student interaction, and group activities. It involves changing the role of the teacher and the educational environment: a transition from

an authoritarian teaching style to facilitation and mentoring, where the teacher creates a safe space for open dialogue; daily rituals for setting up for cooperation, discussing feelings, and creating an atmosphere of trust. Such requirements can be provided in the conditions of NUS.

According to the authors, important conditions for the formation of social skills are also systematicity and consistency, the willingness of teachers to apply appropriate methods, compliance of the content and forms of work with the age-related needs of schooling, namely: for primary school students, it is advisable to focus on the formation of basic skills of interaction, emotional recognition, cooperation and mutual assistance. In middle and senior school age, constructive communication, argumentation, assertiveness, tolerance for differences, critical thinking of social situations and responsible decision-making become of particular importance. In conditions of war and long-term distance or blended learning, methods that restore and expand the possibilities of direct social interaction become of particular importance. Such tools of NUS are group work, educational discussions, role-playing and situational exercises, project activities, learning through problem solving, mutual assessment and reflective practices. Their value lies in the fact that social skills are formed directly in the process of activity: students agree on the distribution of roles, express their own position, listen to others, agree on decisions, learn to take responsibility for a common result and respond constructively to disagreements.

Project activities have special potential, since they combine educational content with real problems and involve long-term interaction between participants. In the process of working on a project, students develop the ability to plan activities, distribute responsibilities, cooperate, search for and evaluate information, present results and be responsible for a common product. Thus, project learning creates natural situations for practicing social skills.

An equally important tool is problem-based and interactive learning. Discussion of ambiguous situations, analysis of different positions, role-playing games, debates, brainstorming and the case method stimulate students to argue, respect other opinions, find a compromise and make decisions. In the context of military and social

transformations, such forms of work can be used to model situations in which students need to interact in conditions of different views, emotional tension or conflict of interests.

The heterogeneity of the military experience of Ukrainian schoolchildren, forced displacement, change in social environment, loss of contact with peers and long-term distance learning determine the different needs of children for social support. Therefore, NUS should provide not only universal opportunities for the development of social skills, but also conditions for their differentiated formation in accordance with the age, experience and educational needs of students.

Thus, the potential of NUS tools in overcoming the problem of complicating the formation of social skills lies in the systematic organization of social interaction, which allows us to consider it not only as an educational reform, but also as a systemic resource for the restoration and development of the social experience of Ukrainian schoolchildren in crisis conditions.

Conclusions

The analysis of the problem of forming social skills of students in the context of modern challenges gives grounds to assert that the transformation of the educational and social environment creates a risk of complicating the conditions of socialization, uneven socio-emotional development, and a deficit of direct interaction of Ukrainian schoolchildren.

The results of the analysis of scientific research and empirical data confirm the relevance of the systematic development of social and emotional skills of students. Communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, assertiveness, tolerance, the ability to resolve conflicts, and work in a team require special attention. At the same time, the results of the research show that the social and emotional development of modern students is not homogeneous and depends on age, life experience, learning conditions, and social environment. Therefore, educational support should take into account the individual and age-related needs of students.

NUS has significant potential for the formation of social skills. Competency and activity approaches, partnership pedagogy, group and project activities, interactive

and problem-based learning, formative assessment and reflective practices make it possible to integrate the development of social skills into the educational process. Social skills should also be formed through real situations of interaction in which students negotiate, cooperate, argue their own position, listen to others, distribute responsibility and jointly make decisions.

Project, group and interactive activities are of particular importance in modern conditions, since they create opportunities for restoring the deficit of direct interaction. At the same time, the effectiveness of such tools depends on the systematic use of them, the readiness of teachers to facilitate and mentor support, a safe environment, as well as the correspondence of methods to the age and educational needs of students.

Therefore, overcoming the problem of complicating the formation of social and emotional skills requires not separate episodic measures, but a comprehensive strategy for organizing the educational environment, the effective resource of which is the NUS.

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