

S.Ye. Zhunussova, L.S. Baimanova, L.N. Naviy

Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan
(E-mail: zhunussova.1982@bk.ru, ljasat@mail.ru, liza281073@mail.ru)

The role of soft skills formation among foreign language teachers

Abstract. *In the 21st century, in the era of globalization, modern teachers, in order to successfully implement their professional activities, need additional skills, so-called «soft skills», without, which even the best professional, nowadays cannot achieve a good result. In accordance with the purpose and objectives of this research, there was investigated and determined the level of soft skills among foreign language teachers of the Akmola region. In order to determine the soft skills, which are related to the teachers' professional competence, there was conducted a questionnaire survey in "Google form" consisting of 16 questions. The total number of respondents was 363 teachers from different districts of the Akmola region. As part of the research, the survey participants were asked to answer questions about the "soft skills" definition and concept. The results of our study revealed an insufficient level of soft skills among 74% of the respondents, which suggests the analysis and adjustment of educational programs for the training of foreign language teachers.*

Keywords: *soft skills, key competencies, teacher, professional development, communicativeness, creativity.*

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Introduction

As the modern world community entered the third millennium of information technology, global computerization, and digitalization, it faced the problem of life technological complexity developing faster than the soft skills level. At the current stage of social development, the entire education system requires significant reformation, with the focus on educational science and pedagogical practice, regardless of the direction of training, being placed on an individual with their vital interests, abilities, and moral values, creativity, critical thinking, integrated problem solving, analyzing and decision-making skills [1, p. 1]. The law of changing generations of educational services, methods, and means of teaching and learning through innovation and substitution of basic innovations plays a key role in the cyclical dynamics of educational development.

A teacher, by the essence of the changes taking place in education today, should be a school leader whose activity is aimed at organizing an educational environment that develops students and colleagues.

A teacher of the new formation is a self-regulating and self-actualizing person, who uses the most modern research methodology, has communicative, informational and other competences, and is a responsible, active, competent, creative teacher.

The National Development Plan of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025 notes that due to the automation of processes and the adoption of artificial intelligence, the need for "soft" skills - the technological, socioemotional and advanced cognitive skills - is growing fast. This indicates that the main peoples' employment will be in complex, non-automated tasks that demand creativity, greater interaction and co-ordination at a distance. The critical thinking, the ability to analyze and problem-solving, active learning, stress resistance, and flexibility will become the main skills in high demand in the labor market. Flexibility in employment will be involved and formalized through the adoption of progressive forms of employment relations [2].

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the importance of "soft" skills formation is noted among the main trends in the transformation of the methodology and the updating of content already at the school level

[3, p.9]. The problem's relevance is also recognized at the level of modern higher education [4].

New educational programs should be oriented towards the development of flexible, professional soft skills, especially needed in the fast-changing world of VUCA (Volatile, uncertain, complex; ambiguous) and involving lifelong learning.

Formulation of the problem

The given research there has tried to identify the level of understanding and mastery of "soft skills" by foreign language teachers in the Akmola region.

In order to create the necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of soft skills, it is important to understand what the modern world expects of teachers with regard to their professional development prospects. Another question is to answer: what qualities and competencies will a foreign language teacher bring to the professional activity? Because there is a gap between what they have learned at school, college, and university and what is required in the workplace. One reason is that the world continues to change dramatically while the professional development system is not adapting fast enough.

The research objective is to determine the level of soft skills of foreign language teachers in the Akmola region, as well as to give the necessary recommendations for the sustainable improvement of the situation in the region.

History

"Soft skills" are social skills such as effective communication, teamwork, the ability to think critically and not be afraid to speak out, self-management, etc.

Nowadays there is a huge variety of soft skills' definitions. For example, according to the Cambridge Dictionary and Collins Dictionary, soft skills are: "Soft skills are interpersonal skills, such as the ability to communicate well with other people and work in a team", "Preferable qualities for particular forms of employment that do not depend on learned knowledge: these include commonsense, the skill to get on with people, and a pleasant, flexible disposition", "The ability of people to communicate with each other and work well together: We focus on soft skills such as team building and communication" [5, 6]. Roselina Shakir, an academic researcher at the University of Malaya in her article "Soft skills at the Malaysian institutions of higher learning" interprets "soft skills" as including aspects of common skills that incorporate non-academic skills such as leadership, collaboration, communication, and lifelong learning. A person's success is influenced not only by his/her or her intelligence but also, for example, by his/her ability to communicate or work with others [7, p.309-315].

According to George Paajanen [8], Ph.D., Chief Scientist at Veris Benchamrk, "soft skills" is a social term that relates to a person's "EQ" (emotional intelligence quotient), a group of personal characteristics, social grace, communication, language, private habits, friendliness and optimism that characterize relationships with other people. S. N. Batsunov, a Russian Candidate of Philosophical Sciences in co-authorship with three candidates of pedagogical sciences in the scientific article: "Modern determinants of soft skills development" emphasize that "...soft skills are unified skills and personal qualities which increase efficiency of work and interaction with other people, namely: development management, competent management of own time, ability to persuade..." [9]. According to V. Shipilov [10], an expert in corporate innovation and entrepreneurship, "...soft-skills are socio-psychological skills that are useful to you in most life situations: communication, leadership, teamwork, public speaking, thinking and others". F. Lukyanov [11] in his research paper describes the concept of "soft skills" as a set of emotional competencies that constitute emotional intelligence. D. S. Yermakov and Zh. A.

Amantay [12] define “soft skills” as a set of non-specialized, supraprofessional social and psychological skills that ensure successful activities, their performance efficiency, high productivity in general and are transversal, i.e. not related to a specific profession.

Therefore, in order to study the given research topic there have been used the next **research methods**:

- literature review;
- method of included observation;
- questionnaires;
- method of critical analysis of research results.

Results and discussion

363 respondents from various districts of the Akmola region participated in the online survey by means of the electronic tool “Google form” (Diagram 1), 59 of them have secondary professional education, and 304 have higher education. The respondents' ages varied from 20 to 42 years old.

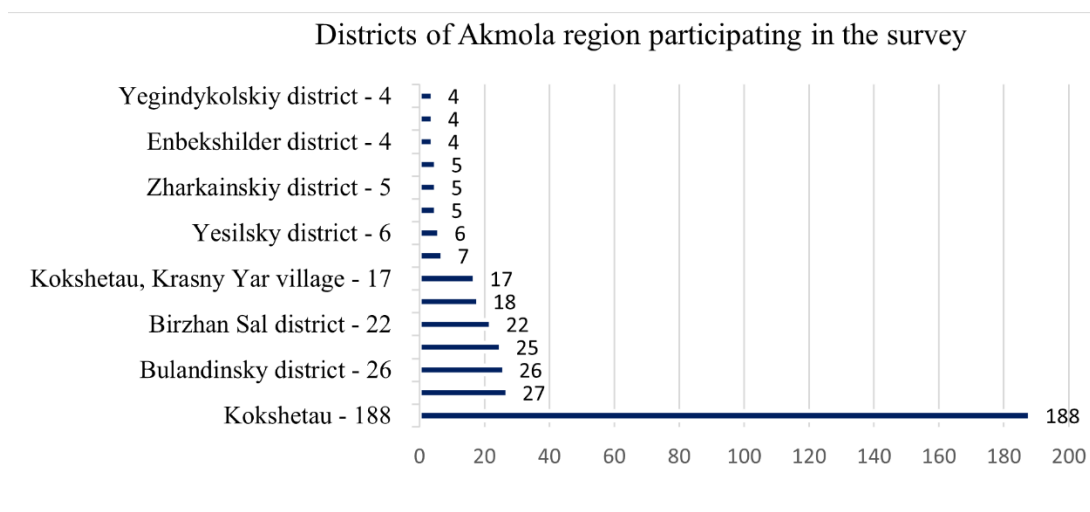


Diagram 1.

The survey showed that the pedagogical experience of the questionnaire respondents is 1-5 years - 41.6%, 5-10 years - 20.1%, 10 or more years of experience -38.3%. (Diagram 2).

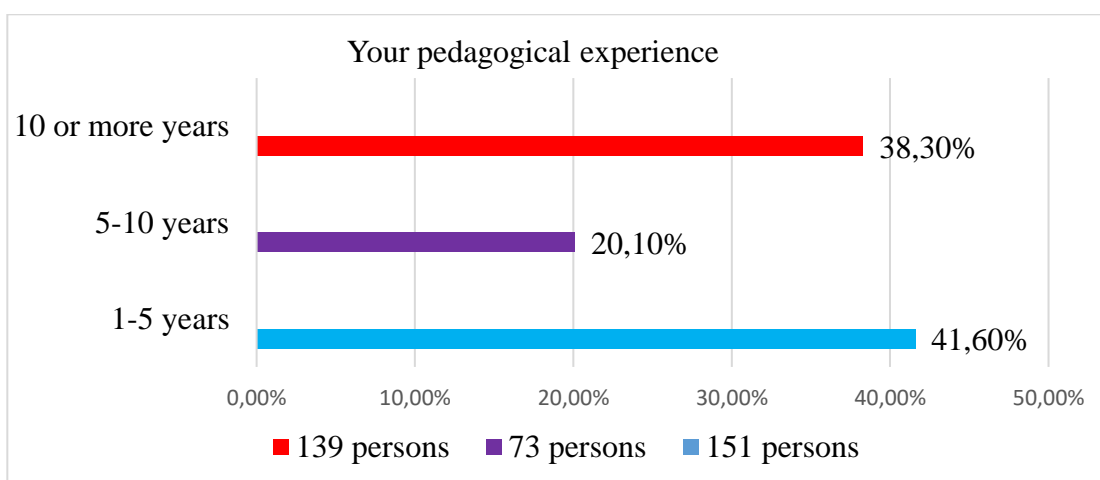


Diagram 2.

To the question, “Is it always difficult for you to navigate the current critical situation?” -18% answered “Yes”, 57.9% answered “Sometimes”, 37.2% responded negatively (Diagram 3).

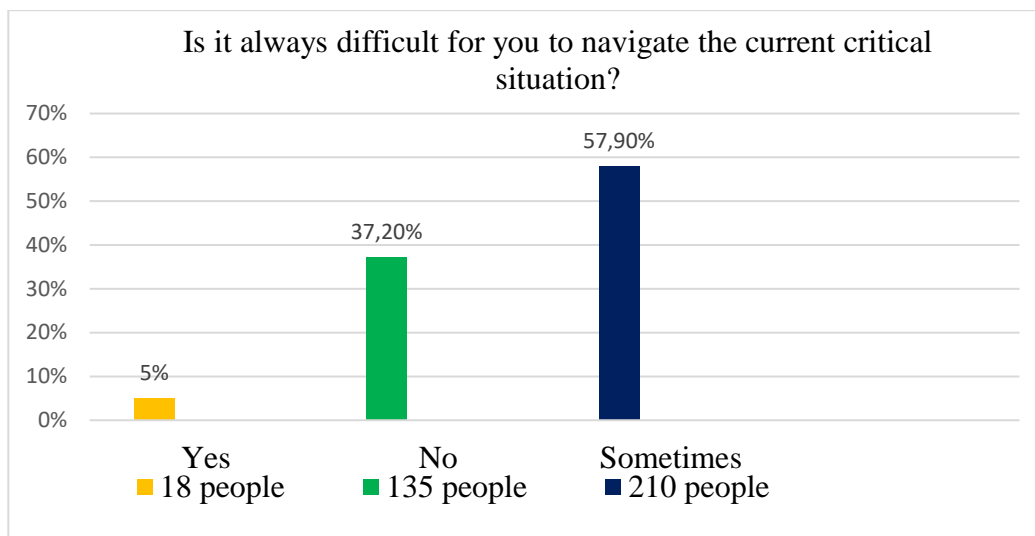


Diagram 3.

The results of answers to the question “Do you easily establish contacts with unfamiliar people?” turned out to be maximally positive, which indicates that more than a half of teachers are open-minded. Nevertheless, 20.7% responded negatively, which points to certain problem of communication (Diagram 4).

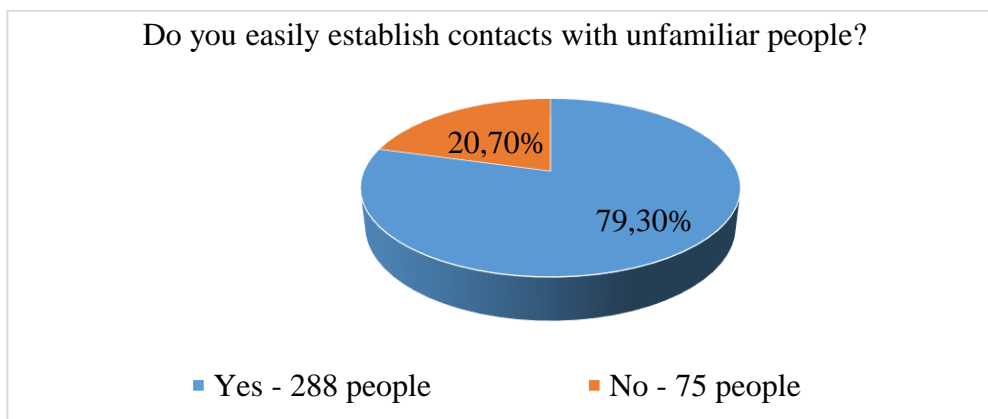


Diagram 4.

We came to interesting conclusions by analyzing the answers of the respondents to the question “Do you often take the initiative in dealing with issues affecting the interests of your colleagues?”. Most respondents answered “Sometimes” - 59%, and 14.9% answered negatively at all, which indicates complete indifference to their colleagues (Diagram 5).

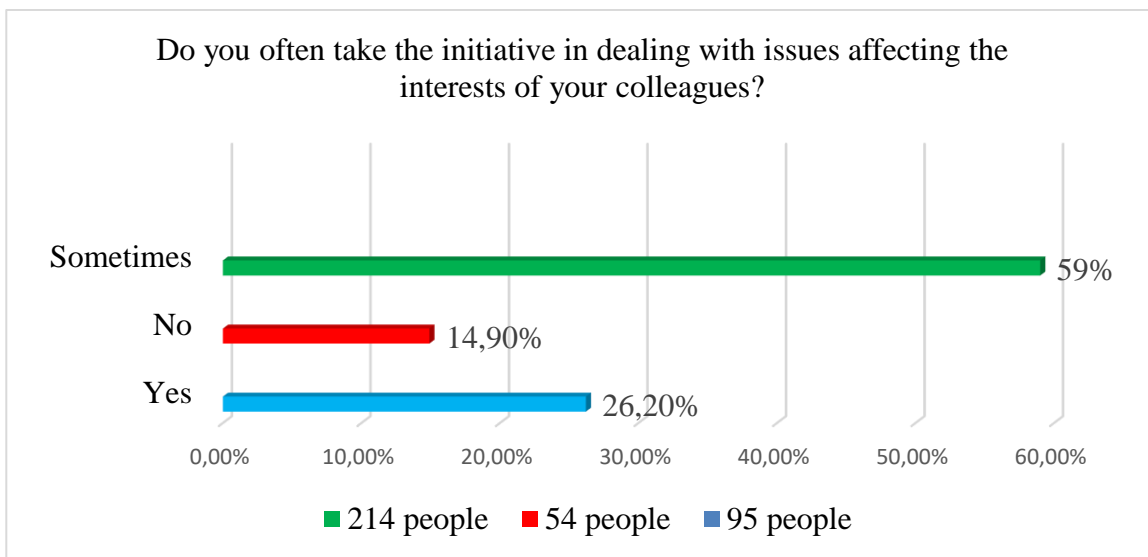


Diagram 5.

The results of the next question about their confidence among their colleagues are comforting, with 90.1% answering “Yes” and only 9.9% “No” (Diagram 6).

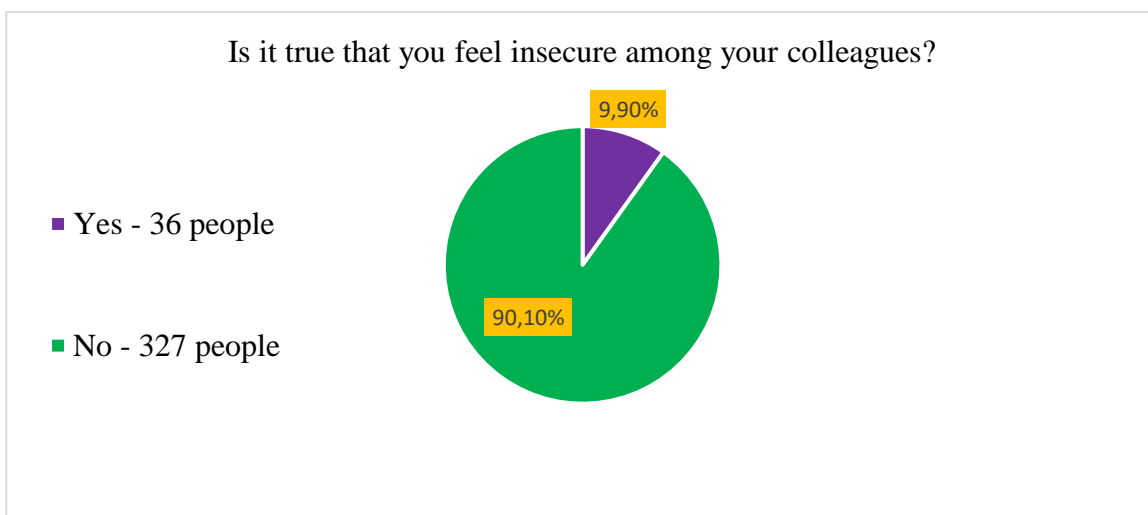


Diagram 6.

The level of mastery of such a necessary skill as “Time management” can be determined by the answers to the question “Are you often late for business meetings?”, 91.5% of teachers adhere to this skill, which indicates their responsibility (Diagram 7).

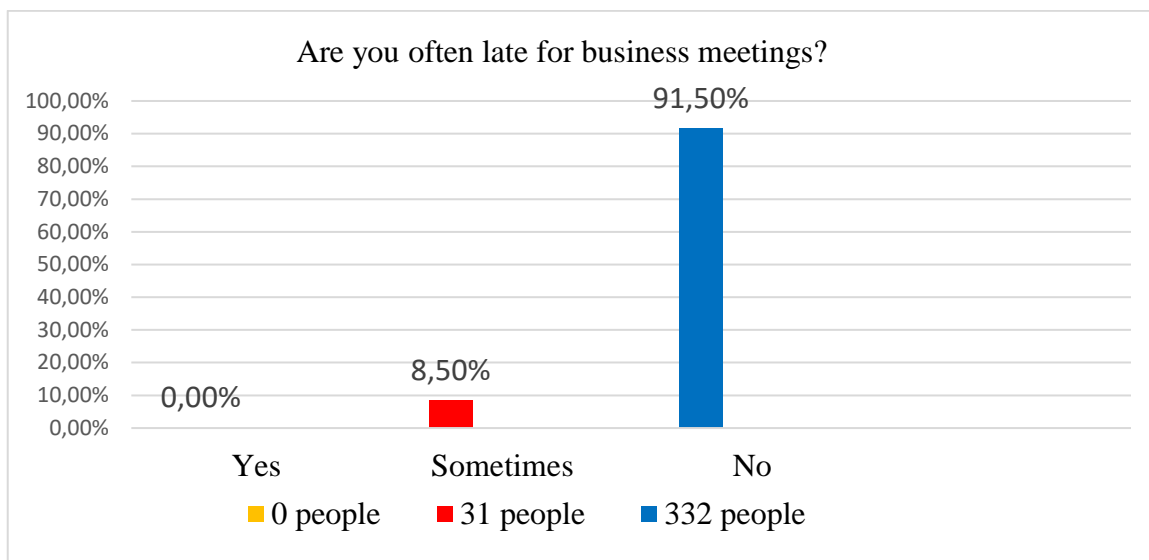


Diagram 7.

The majority of teachers use creative ways of working in their classes, 71.3%, while the remaining respondents sometimes use them or do not use them at all (Diagram 8).

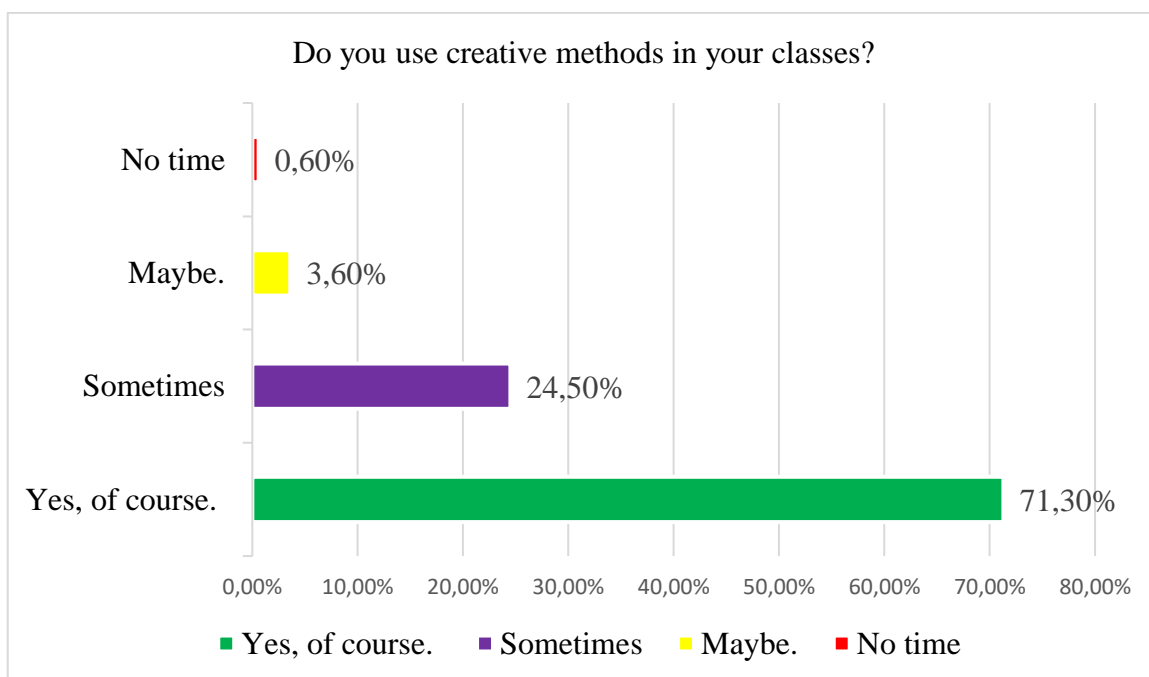


Diagram 8.

In a conflict situation at work, 11.3% would turn to their management for help, 14.3% would ask their colleagues for help, 1.7% would leave it as it was, and 72.7% would try to resolve the situation themselves (Diagram 9).

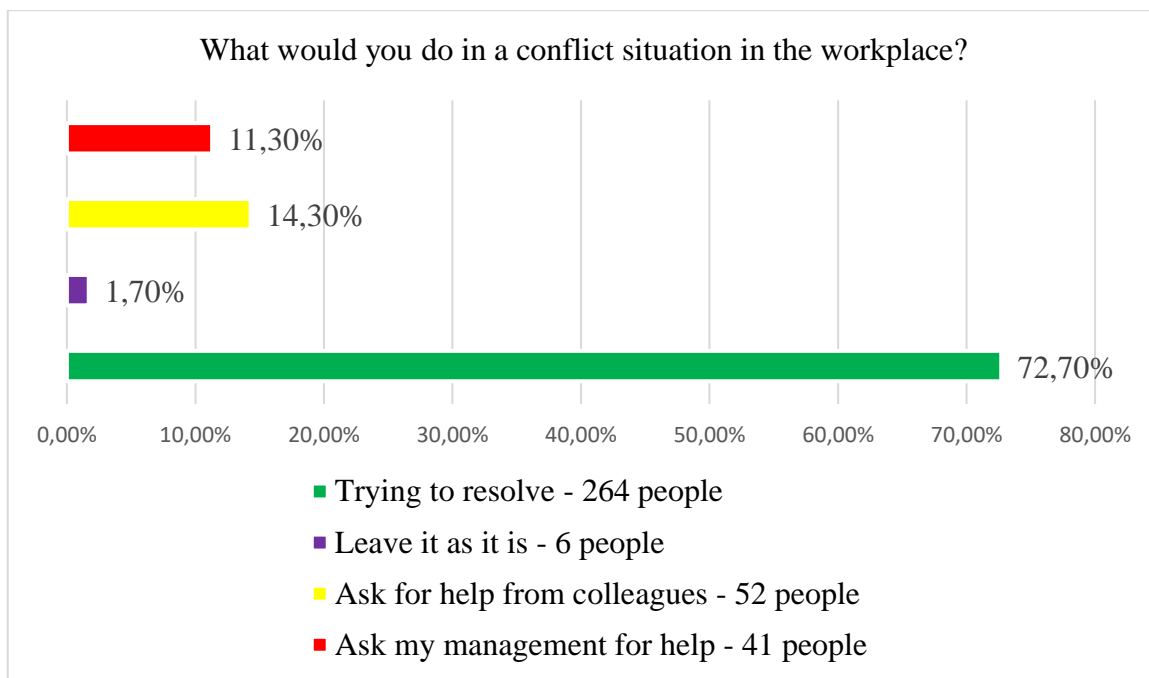


Diagram 9.

When asked about self-assessment of the development level of soft skills, 22.3% responded that they have completely mastered these skills and use them effectively in all standard situations. The main part of the questionnaires are in the process of mastering these skills, they understand their significance, but do not always effectively demonstrate them in practical work - 74.7%. 3% of the respondents do not have the skills at all, do not understand their importance, do not try to apply them and develop them (Diagram 10).

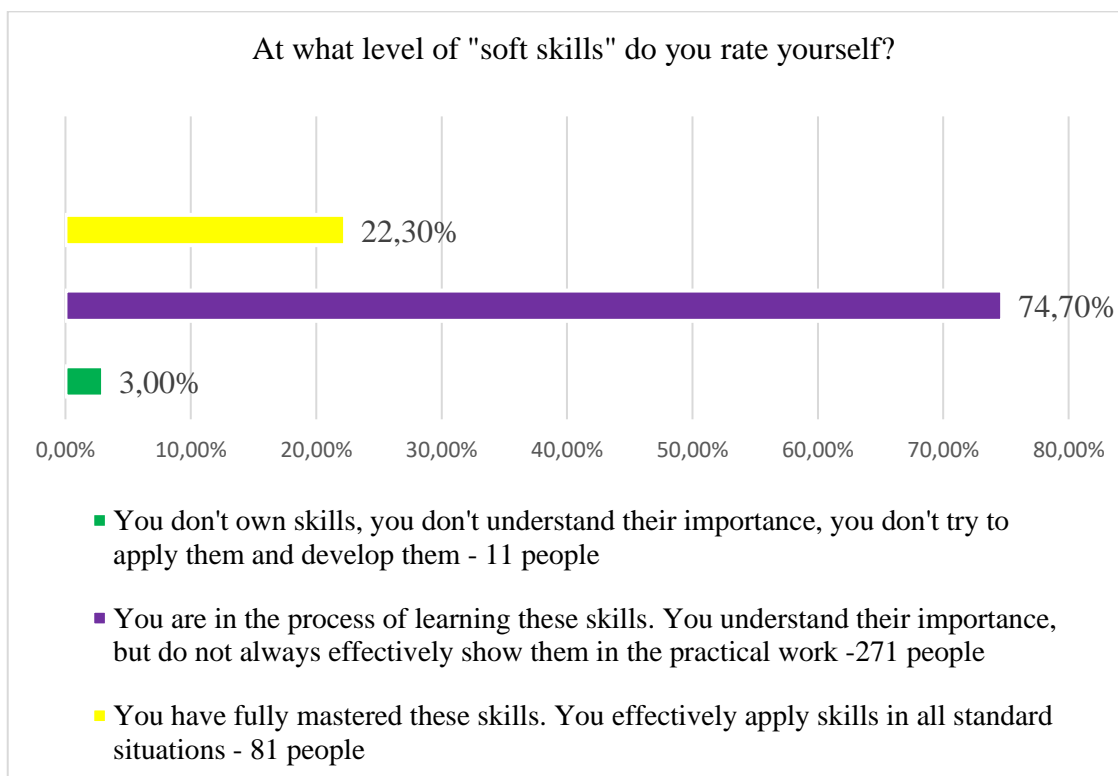


Diagram 10.

According to the results of choosing the most important professional skills, the respondents noted the following five: creativity, communication, creative thinking, responsibility, self-organization and confidence (Diagram 11).

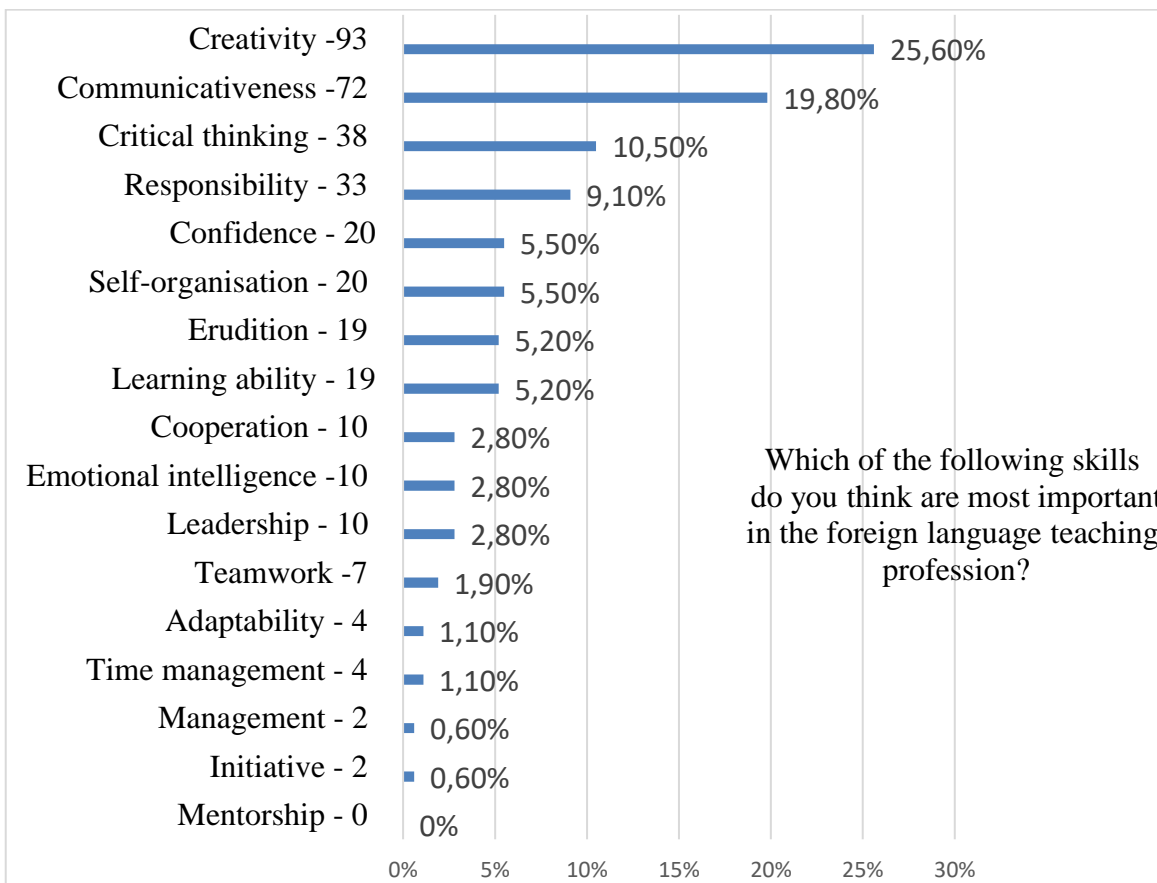


Diagram 11.

Based on the research, it was revealed that 98.3% of respondents consider it necessary to form and develop “soft skills” (Diagram 12).

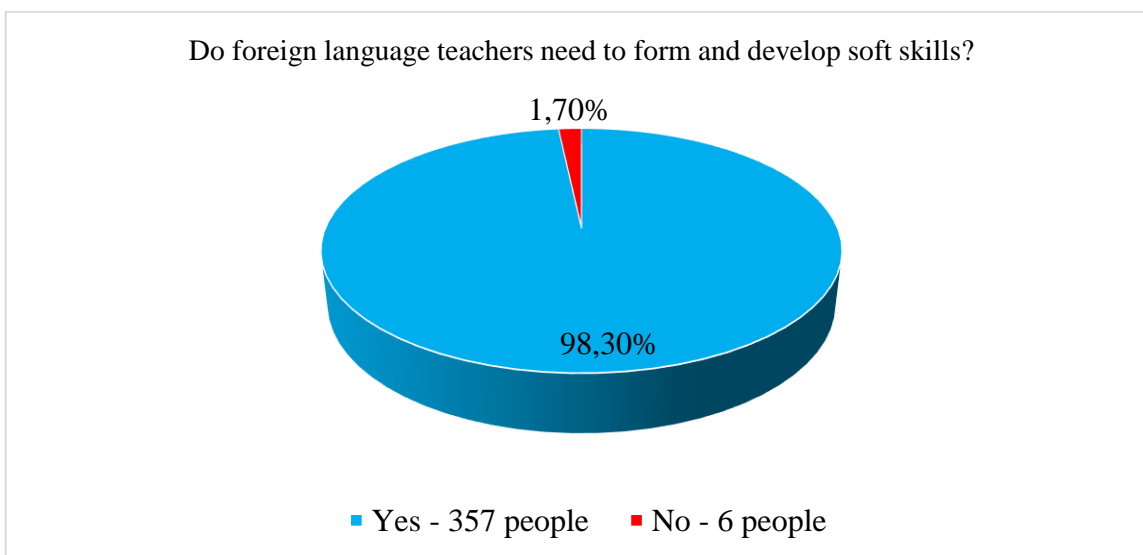


Diagram 12.

Conclusion

According to the results of the research, we came to the conclusion that the level of soft skills proficiency of foreign language teachers in the Akmola region is insufficient. Teachers showed, on the one hand, the demand for such skills, on the other hand, insufficient readiness of a significant part of the respondents to form them in the educational process. To become a new format teacher in accordance with the updated educational content it is necessary to possess such skills as “soft skills”.

Based on the above-mentioned research results, we consider it reasonable to make adjustments in the educational programs for training future teachers of foreign languages. The innovations used in the educational process should meet the urgent needs and opportunities of the educational organization, satisfy all participants in the educational process, as well as contribute to the achievement of high-quality, sustainable, and high performance. Thus, this study is relevant for today and requires further research work.

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С.Е. Жүнісова, Л. С. Байманова, Л.Н. Нәби

Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Көкшетау университеті, Көкшетау, Қазақстан

Шет тілі мұғалімдерінде «жұмсақ дағдыларды» қалыптастырудың рөлі

Аңдатпа. 21 ғасырда, жаһандану дәуірінде қазіргі мұғалімдер өздерінің кәсіби қызметін сәтті жүзеге асыру үшін «икемді дағдылар» деп аталатын қосымша дағдыларды қажет етеді, онсыз ең жақсы маман да жақсы нәтижеге қол жеткізе алмайды. Осы зерттеудің мақсаты мен міндеттеріне сәйкес Ақмола облысының шет тілдері мұғалімдерінің «икемді дағдылары» деңгейі зерттеліп, анықталды. Мұғалімдердің кәсіби құзыреттілігіне жататын «икемді дағдыларды» анықтау үшін 16 сұрақтан тұратын «Google forms» сауалнамасы жүргізілді. Сауалнамаға қатысқандардың жалпы саны Ақмола облысының әртүрлі аудандарынан 363 мұғалімді құрады. Зерттеу аясында сауалнамаға қатысушыларға «икемді дағдылар» анықтамасы мен түсінігі туралы сұрақтарға жауап беру ұсынылды. Зерттеу нәтижелерінде сауалнамаға қатысқандардың 74%-да «икемді дағдылар» деңгейінің жеткіліксіздігі анықталды, бұл шет тілдері мұғалімдерін даярлаудың білім беру бағдарламаларын талдауды және түзетуді қажет етеді.

Түйін сөздер: икемді дағдылар, негізгі құзыреттер, мұғалім, кәсіби даму, коммуникативтілік, шығармашылық.

С.Е. Жунусова, Л.С. Байманова, Л.Н. Навий

Кокшетауский университет имени Ш. Уалиханова, Кокшетау, Казахстан

Роль формирования «мягких навыков» у учителей иностранного языка

Аннотация. В 21 веке, в эпоху глобализации, современным учителям для успешного осуществления своей профессиональной деятельности необходимы дополнительные навыки, так называемые «мягкие навыки», без которых даже самый лучший профессионал не может добиться хорошего результата. В соответствии с целью и задачами данного исследования был исследован и определен уровень «мягких навыков» у учителей иностранных языков Акмолинской области. Для определения «мягких навыков», которые относятся к профессиональной компетентности педагогов, был проведен анкетный опрос в «Google forms», состоящий из 16 вопросов. Общее количество опрошенных составило 363 учителя из разных районов Акмолинской области. В рамках исследования участникам опроса было предложено ответить на вопросы об определении и понятии «мягких навыков». Результаты исследования выявили недостаточный уровень «мягких навыков» у 74% опрошенных, что требует анализ и корректировку образовательных программ подготовки учителей иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: мягкие навыки, ключевые компетенции, учитель, профессиональное развитие, коммуникативность, креативность.

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Information about authors:

Zhunussova S.Ye. – **Corresponding author**, The 1st year doctoral student in “Foreign language: two foreign languages”, Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan.

Baimanova L.S. – Candidate of Philological Sciences, Professor of the General Linguistics and Literature Department of Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan.

Naviy L.N. – Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor of the Pedagogy and Psychology Department of Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan.

Жүнісова С.Е. – **корреспонденция үшін автор**, Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Көкшетау университетінің «Шетел тілі: екі шет тілі» мамандығы бойынша бірінші курс докторанты, Көкшетау, Қазақстан.

Байманова Л.С. – филология ғылымдарының кандидаты, Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Көкшетау университетінің Жалпы тіл білімі және әдебиет кафедрасының профессоры, Көкшетау, Қазақстан.

Нәби Л.Н. – педагогика ғылымдарының кандидаты, Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Көкшетау университетінің Педагогика және психология кафедрасының профессоры, Көкшетау, Қазақстан.