



Development of soft skills as a part of an LSP course

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Due to changes to the modern working model (task-oriented projects, focus on team work, intense competition with other companies, staff mobility, outsourcing of services, increasing expectations toward prospective co-workers), mastering a set of soft skills seems to be one of the most important requirements – next to professional expertise – that can enhance the efficacy and quality of realized undertakings. However, the need to implement soft skills in a professional environment does not always accompany training, and whenever they are developed in the workplace they are necessarily developed in action.

Introduction

The existing demand for completing a set of pre-requisite qualifications can be satisfied by offering soft skills practice training, either within the academic curriculum or within a company, or through a synergetic combination of soft skills development with other forms of training. This article describes possibilities for designing and implementing soft skills training methods that can be offered as an integral part of an LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) course from the perspective of LSP teachers.

The following questions lay the foundations for the considerations developed in this paper:

- Can soft skills be developed as a part of an LSP course?
- Which soft skills can be incorporated in an LSP program?
- How can the chosen soft skills be developed/integrated within the LSP classroom?

On the one hand, the methodology used to prepare and conduct soft skill-oriented tasks for LSP classes is an issue (and not an obvious choice, because the methodology described in the literature refers either to soft skills training or teaching language for specific purposes). On the other hand, the question of which instruments to use to discuss the results of the conducted tasks arises. The aim of this paper is to check the potential for interdisciplinary solutions to improve professional communication and test the methods for

teaching core soft skills in an academic setting. The following paper is divided into three sections.

The first section consists of the theoretical part; in this section, different approaches to various soft skills phenomena are presented, and the link between soft skills and language, as well as their function in the work place, is analyzed. The focus of the second section is about soft skills-oriented teaching of language for professional needs. The third part of the paper presents the results of a survey conducted among LSP teachers representing different languages, in order to identify the possibilities of soft skills training implementation within the LSP curricula and compare it with skills that have been trained in reality. In the final section, conclusions and perspectives on the analyzed issue are discussed.

Literature review

Definition of soft skills

The meaning of “soft skills” has rapidly changed as a result of globalization, the explosion of information technology, and the competitiveness of the modern job market. Developing soft skills has become a prerequisite for success in the knowledge-based economy. However, the definition of this phenomenon leads to discussions between scientists. The fact that various authors list different skills and group them in various manners adds to the complexity of this question.

Bhatnagar and Bhatnagar (2012, p. 3) contrast soft skills with hard skills and refer to them as communication in the professional setting. In a broader sense, they are linked to the human abilities of processing knowledge and problem solving; however, in the narrower sense, soft skills are understood as coexisting with other people through, for example, active listening, formulating efficient and precise messages, negotiating, etc. Generally, soft skills are meant as “interpersonal competencies” that *are more difficult to define due to their subjectivity, which consequently makes*

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them difficult to measure (Bhatnagar and Bhatnagar, 2012, p. 4). The main difficulties with formulating one coherent definition widen due to the multidimensional nature of the phenomena included in the multitude of diverse categories – for instance, listening skills, communication skills, team-building skills, leadership skills, persuasion skills, and counseling.

For example, Nieragden (2000) introduces the following classification system of soft skills:

- interaction (such as attitude awareness, conflict handling, tolerance),
- self-management (such as decision-making, willingness to learn, self-discipline and resistance to stress),
- communication (such as listening skills and presentation skills),
- organization (problem solving).

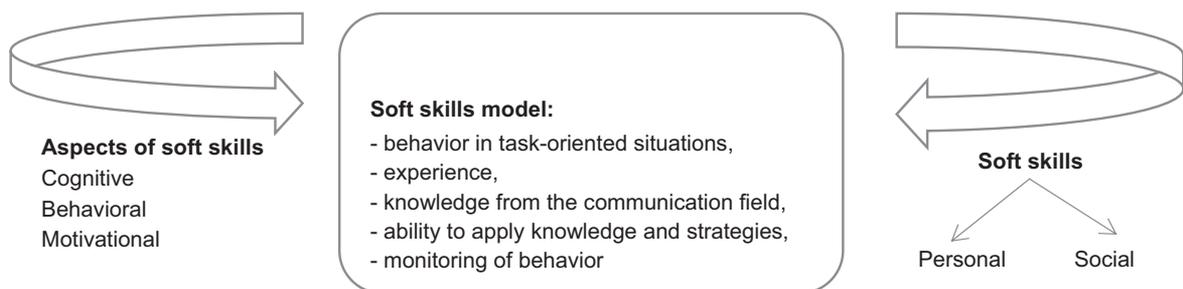
Yadav (2012, p. 196) analyses soft skills through communication, presentation, and teamwork, strongly underlining the fact that soft skills should be taught at the university level. The main reason for developing them is their impact on career choice, making appropriate decisions, and engaging in effective communication, emphasizing the tight relationship between soft skills and language function. An interesting contribution to the discussion on soft skills is given by Ramesh and Ramesh (2010, p. 4), who emphasize that soft skills *do not equal good language command and vocabulary*, which stands in contrast to

the communication skills mentioned in the other cited definitions. Soft skills relate more to the ability to choose an appropriate register in a certain situation. All the same, it is worth stressing that soft skills are strongly rooted in the linguistic context (Ramesh and Ramesh, 2010, p. 4).

In her reflection on soft skills, Fastnacht (2006, pp. 109–110) also takes individual aspects of soft skills into consideration and defines them as human potential, developed in a task-related environment. The specific character of soft skills in social relations is depicted in the model of soft skills presented in figure 1.

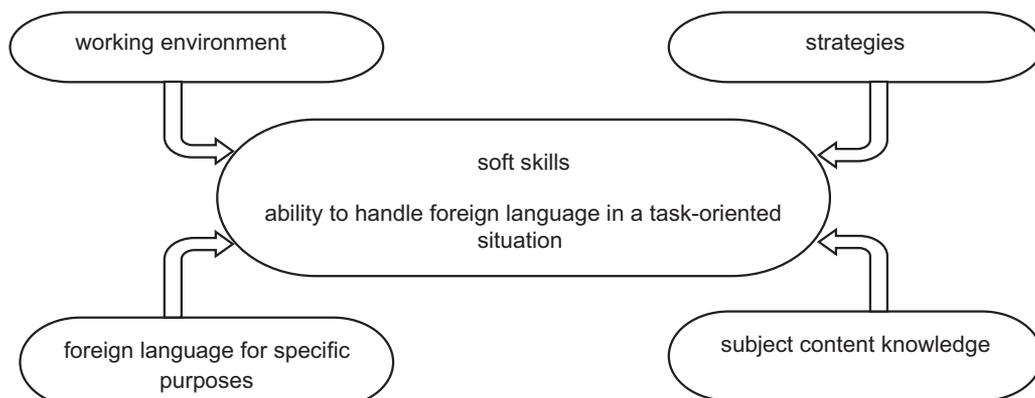
The presented model is based on the trichotomy of the functions of soft skills, which illustrates the three main directions of research on the topic: behavioral, cognitive, and motivational. The behavioral aspect studies the patterns of behavior of individuals facing certain situations and the simultaneous reaction of the audience towards the communicative measures taken, especially when dealing with a given task. The cognitive dimension can be characterized as the ability to analyze a given situation and work out an accurate interpersonal strategy – frequently understood as emotional intelligence. The motivational aspect highlights the meaning of individual features (like the ability to raise an interpersonal challenge in a communicative situation) that determine flawless communication (Fastnacht, 2006, p. 111).

Figure 1. Soft skills model



Source: Fastnacht (2006, p. 111).

Figure 2. Soft skills in the LSP context



Source: author's findings.

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To conclude, the cited definitions show the wide scope of meanings attributed to soft skills by different researchers. Simultaneously, it is worth emphasizing that, due to their utility in authentic professional situations, their introduction into the LSP teaching process is necessary. However, a reformation of the definition is needed, due to the complex individual, but also highly task-oriented, nature in the teaching process.

In this respect, soft skills can be understood as an ability to handle strategies for implementing foreign language and subject content knowledge in a professional environment, in order to cope with professional tasks. Consequently, the development of soft skills should be closely related to the development of strategies and techniques necessary for coping with professional situations.

The meaning of soft skills in the university and corporate environment

The meaning of soft skills can be observed in both the university and professional environments, which proves the legitimacy of the statement that their development goes along with lifelong learning principles and should be initiated at the university level. Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2010, p. 221) emphasize that *unlike academic or disciplinary knowledge, which is subject-based, content specific and formally assessed, soft skills comprise a range of competencies that are independent of, albeit often developed by, formal curricula and rarely assessed explicitly.*

Elena Tevdovska (2015) also presents arguments for the importance of soft skills in the context of higher education and in favor of integrating them in the curriculum of the foreign language learning classroom, based on the results of the survey conducted among MA and PhD students in an EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom at South East European University, who were simultaneously working. Tevdovska (2015) concludes that the majority of students are aware of being in the position to use or lack soft skills. Participants in the survey noted that the *connection between them, other colleagues or between the supervisors or the subordinates can and should be improved* by implementing soft skills (Tevdovska, 2015, p. 100). Concerning language skills and knowledge, all of the participants admitted that they have to communicate in English at the workplace, mostly via email. Interestingly, *when asked if their undergraduate studies could have prepared them to understand and deal better with these situations, most of them replied affirmatively and the majority (20) stated that the skills of understanding and communicating with others can be learned* (Tevdovska, 2015, p. 102).

Kwiecińska-Zdrenka (2012, p. 13) analyzed the corporate environment and the use of soft skills and reported on the way entrepreneurs and potential employers perceive soft skills in the context of the pragmatic skills their employees offer in the workplace. The majority of the survey participants pointed to cooperativeness and communicativeness

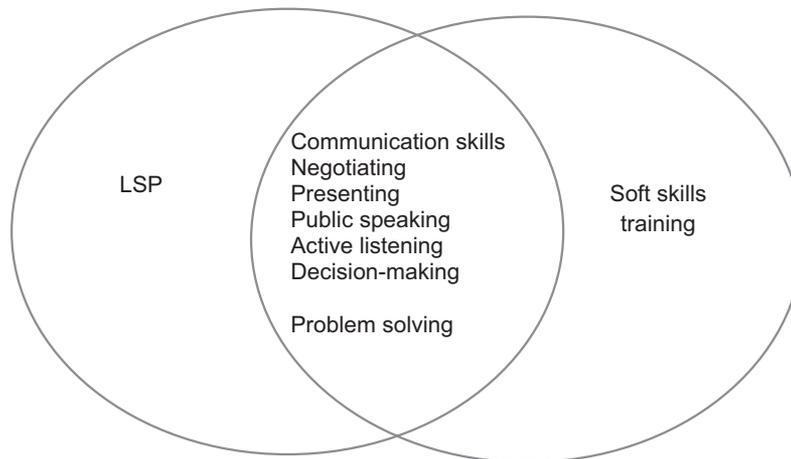
as the most basic soft skills. In the given answers, the meaning of negotiating skills, assertiveness, and the ability to present one's opinions in a clear and transparent way were also highlighted. In their statements, few interviewees identified the ability to deal with stress and time pressure. The answers given prove the wide spectrum of influence that soft skills have on workplace efficiency. In the study, employers were also asked to estimate the meaning of soft skills, both within company life and in communication with external companies and clients. In both cases, participants in the survey admitted that soft skills play an important role and that the lack of soft skills causes a deterioration in the atmosphere at work and prolongs many procedures, not to mention hurts relations with external clients (Kwiecińska-Zdrenka, 2012, pp. 13–15).

To summarize, in the approaches discussed in relation to the question of soft skills, it is worth mentioning that the field is relatively young, but is developing dynamically in response to the needs and requirements of the current job market. Although soft skills were initially analyzed in reference to the non-academic professional world, universities as institutions conducting research on communication and preparing graduates for their initial careers should teach soft skills. In addition, soft skills should not be associated solely with jargon, but with extended situation-oriented communication skills, which will be analyzed later in this article as a common foothold for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and soft skills training.

Soft skills oriented LSP teaching

The teaching methods used in institutional classes focus mainly on one-way communication and do not affect abilities or patterns of behavior. In opposition to traditional methods, Fastnacht (2006, p. 113) suggests a model of teaching based on soft skills that involves the needs and interests of students in tandem with active ways of exercising behavioral, cognitive, and motivational aspects, in order to increase the attractiveness of developed workplace skills. Fastnacht perceives knowledge acquired through actively developing behavioral patterns as a means to achieve these aims.

Using language for specific purposes is closely connected to a work-oriented context. Students are drawn to LSP not only because of their interest in the English language, but also because of the necessity to fulfill tasks by using the language, such as writing an email, negotiating, presenting, etc. (Bracaj, 2014, p. 42). The students' needs are so essential for potential success in the course that *all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning* (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992, p. 19). Grygiel (2015, p. 77) underlines the fact that *language is a dynamic system and as such it evolves along three basic directions – in time (historically), in space (geographically) and in stratification (socially).* The third aspect of language can

Figure 3. Common areas of interest between soft skills and LSP

Source: author's findings.

especially evolve, revealing the deep sustainability of professional language communication through socially driven mechanisms. In professional fields, the concise meaning of statements and the manner of presenting is far more important than in everyday life. Each person is equipped with a range of inborn skills allowing them to manage a specific field; however, their skills need *shaping, reshaping and refurbishing in most cases with training* (Mousawa and Elyas, 2015, p. 1058).

Soft skills improve one's employability in the sense of their ability to cope with the challenges of the professional world. Communication skills, falling into many types (such as language proficiency, conversation, presentation, and behavioral patterns) form the basis of developing other soft skills in many cases (Schulz, 2008, pp. 146–152).

The mutual relationship between soft skills and language for specific purposes is depicted in figure 3.

Undeniably, some elements of soft skills training are present in the LSP classroom, although teachers and students are frequently unaware of their existence. Take presentations for example: even a few decades ago, their advantages were already appreciated in foreign language classrooms, where students were obliged to give short speeches on a given topic without the use of Power Point, which not only improved their language skills, but also increased their self-assurance and ability to highlight the most important elements in a speech.

Methods to implement soft skills oriented LSP

Nowadays, soft skills oriented LSP teaching is not only required to develop the tools needed to realize the main aims of the course, but also the instruments needed to measure the results and outcomes.

The aims of soft skills oriented LSP teaching can be formulated as follows. The following is the author's suggested formulation for soft skills oriented LSP teaching:

- a) developing the communication skills needed at the workplace by using language specific to a certain field,
- b) using language for specific purposes in simulated situations (problem solving, decision-making, etc.), recalling real situations in the workplace,
- c) training of the speed of reactions to real-life situations,
- d) training of communication strategies,
- e) reinforcing teamwork,
- f) increasing individual motivation to learn LSP by showing real usage of the language in a professional environment.

Didactic methods and strategies used in soft skills oriented LSP teaching include the following (Price, 2015):

- Professionalism/work:
 - a) introducing checklists to monitor the progress of students,
 - b) tracking test scores to encourage self-assessment,
 - c) concentrating on defining "added value" after each class.
- Presentations:
 - a) preparation of professional Power Point presentations,
 - b) preparing and evaluating oral speeches accompanying prepared presentations.
- Teamwork:
 - a) giving tasks encouraging cooperation and teamwork,
 - b) reflecting on a cooperative model of working,
 - c) clearly defining responsibility.
- Oral communication:
 - a) using specific language in a professional context,
 - b) extending specific vocabulary,
 - c) organizing professional conversations,
 - d) negotiation role-playing.

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- Listening:
 - a) exercising active listening in conversations referring to the working environment,
 - b) playing original interviews, news, reports specific to the chosen field,
 - c) summarizing the most important issues mentioned in the audio,
 - d) listening for detail,
 - e) categorizing clue information.
- Written communication:
 - a) writing different genres typical for the working milieu, like emails, paragraphs, reports, etc.,
 - b) summarizing and synthesizing professional texts in written form,
 - c) characterizing the lexical and syntactic structure of specific texts,
 - d) preparing lists of specific terminology for the particular field.
- Problem solving
 - a) introducing problem solving activities simulating real situations from a work environment,
 - b) role-playing.

Research design

The described research is a quantitative study (a pilot study for an extensive research project), with the objectives of indicating which soft skills can be integrated into the LSP teaching process and of developing strategies of soft skills training implementation into the teaching of language for specific purposes.

Although the topic (of soft skills, J.K–D) is widely debated in all the countries, in some of them (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, UK) there are many initiatives going on, whilst in some others (Greece, Italy, Spain) the topic is still developing (Clinque, 2016). To the knowledge of the author, research about the topic, as well as the literature about soft skills implementation in the foreign language teaching field, is relatively scarce in Poland, forming an additional motivation to undertake the following study.

Regarding the division of the countries made by Clinque (2016), Poland belongs to the still-developing countries in the context of any initiatives concerning the development of soft skills, which leads to the creation of an extended gap between the professional reality of international companies in which graduates are searching for employment and the preparation for future acting on the job market.

The study is encased in the quantitative side of the investigation and collects and analyzes LSP teachers' opinions on the subject. It is designed as a starting point for the preparation of a more detailed survey that will allow for a more extensive study of the topic. The following research questions were analyzed as a result of the study:

- Can soft skills be developed as a part of an LSP course?

- Which soft skills can be incorporated in an LSP program?
- How can the chosen soft skills be developed/integrated within the LSP classroom?

The author of the paper was inspired by the research conducted by Tevdovska (2015), which presents the utility of soft skills from a student perspective. The idea of the presented study was to look at the problem, taking the view of teachers/educators into account, and simultaneously showing opportunities that present themselves when soft skills are implemented in the teaching process.

Participants' profiles

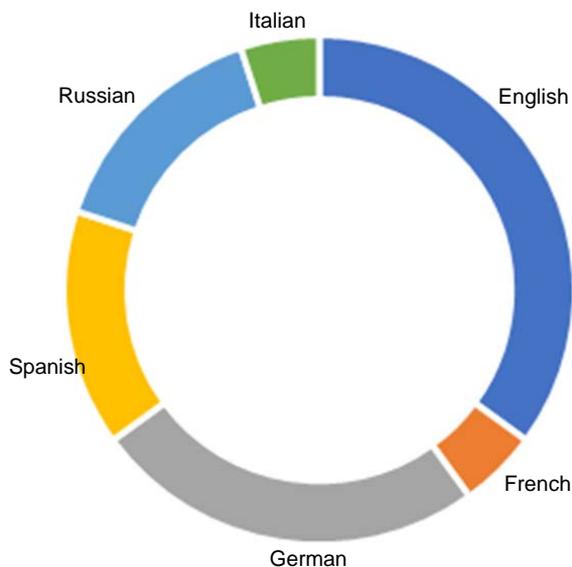
In the survey, twenty LSP teachers representing different institutions were asked about the potential possibilities of implementing soft skills development within their curricula. This sample has intentionally diverse characteristics regarding student proficiency levels, the languages, the kind of LSP (medical, economic, etc.) taught, and teaching experience.

All of the variables were crucial to present in order to respect the reality of pluralism within the teaching environment. The randomly selected group (20 individuals) constitutes a sample of diverse teachers' specificities, highlighting different views and different implementation possibilities within the issue of soft skills.

Each of the figures below provides information about the structure of the surveyed group.

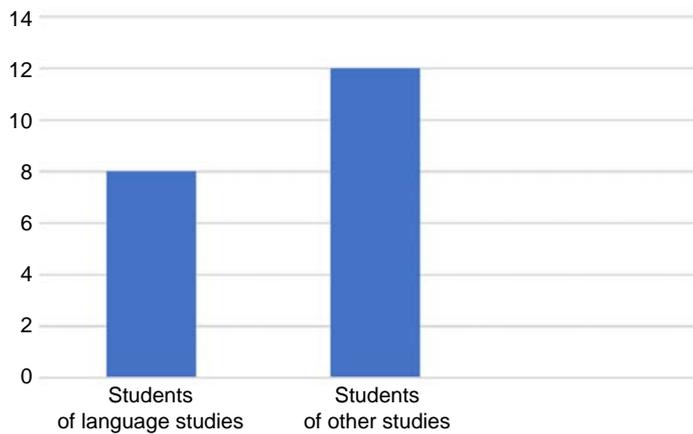
The largest groups of surveyed teachers were represented by English teachers (seven participants) and German teachers (five participants) (see figure 4), whereas the smallest group was represented by Russian teachers.

Figure 4. Languages taught by the teachers taking part in the survey



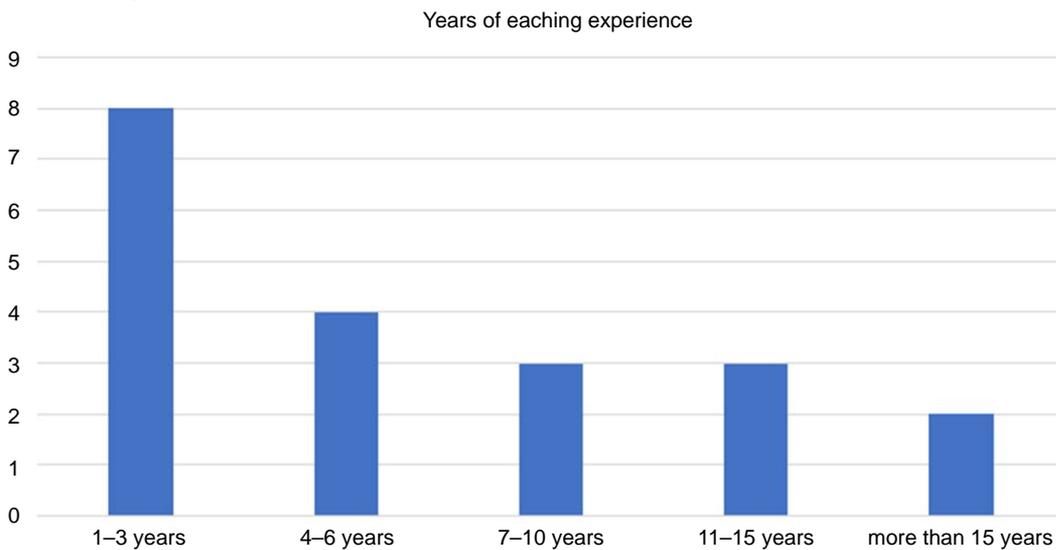
Source: author's findings.

Figure 5. Division by the group taught



Source: author`s findings.

Figure 6. Teaching experience



Source: author`s findings.

The surveyed teachers worked with different groups of learners. While all of the teachers were teaching adult students, the learners were divided into two groups: students of language studies and students who were not involved in language studies.

The relationship presented in figure 5 can be explained by the fact that teaching LSP has a much longer tradition in fields other than language studies.

Figure 6 depicts the interviewed teachers' years of experience teaching.

The majority of the surveyed LSP teachers (eight participants) had between one and three years of experience in teaching.

Methodology

The instrument used to conduct the study was a survey created by the author of this paper. The

designed tool was divided into two sections: one consisting of closed questions and another consisting of open questions. The first part referred to the experience of teachers in developing soft skills in the LSP classroom, whereas the second part considered their recommendations and suggestions. The first part of the survey consisted of four questions referring to their experience incorporating methods that developed soft skills within the LSP classroom. The second part of the survey dealt with their perspectives of soft skills being integrated in LSP teaching. The participating teachers were asked to answer three questions concerning this issue.

The described survey was conducted from September, 2017 to January, 2018 among twenty foreign language teachers teaching LSP at public and private institutions. The number of the participants is not representative, but it is to be considered a suggestion for further research on the topic.

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Results and discussion

Part one – experience

In answering the first question of part one, fifteen out of the twenty surveyed teachers declared that soft skills training should be part of LSP teaching. Two participants underlined the fact that soft skills training can be part of LSP teaching. Three interviewees had no opinion.

In the second question, twelve LSP teachers confirmed that they introduced elements of soft skills training as a part of their classes. The soft skills developed during the classes are shown in figure 6 below, and teachers could choose more than one answer.

The most frequently developed soft skills are discussions, teamwork, work planning, and developing argumentation strategies (figure 7). The least commonly developed skills are work ethic, business etiquette, and writing. The explanation for why the first two are relatively seldom developed in the LSP classroom may be because they are closely connected with corporate reality and require wider knowledge about corporate procedures, which is not easy to gain for a teacher who may have never worked in a company. The choice of soft skills was based on research found in the literature concerning skills needed in the work environment (see Fischer-Kania, 2008; Kwiecińska-Zdrenka, 2012).

The third question referred to the method used. In this question, teachers could choose among the following methods: exercises from the course book,

exercises they developed themselves, meetings with experts, role-playing and simulations, exercises prepared on the basis of authentic material, exercises developed by the project (Erasmus) partnership, organizing special seminars, and conducting projects with feedback concerning soft skills. Additionally, teachers could offer their own answers, but none of the participants extended the choice of methods.

Among the most frequently named methods of developing soft skills (question three), teachers mentioned exercises from books (eight teachers). Interestingly, the biggest group (six teachers) consisted of English teachers, which is probably a result of English having the most developed market of course books in comparison to other languages. Other responses were role-playing and simulations. Only one person pointed to bigger projects for developing more soft skills at once.

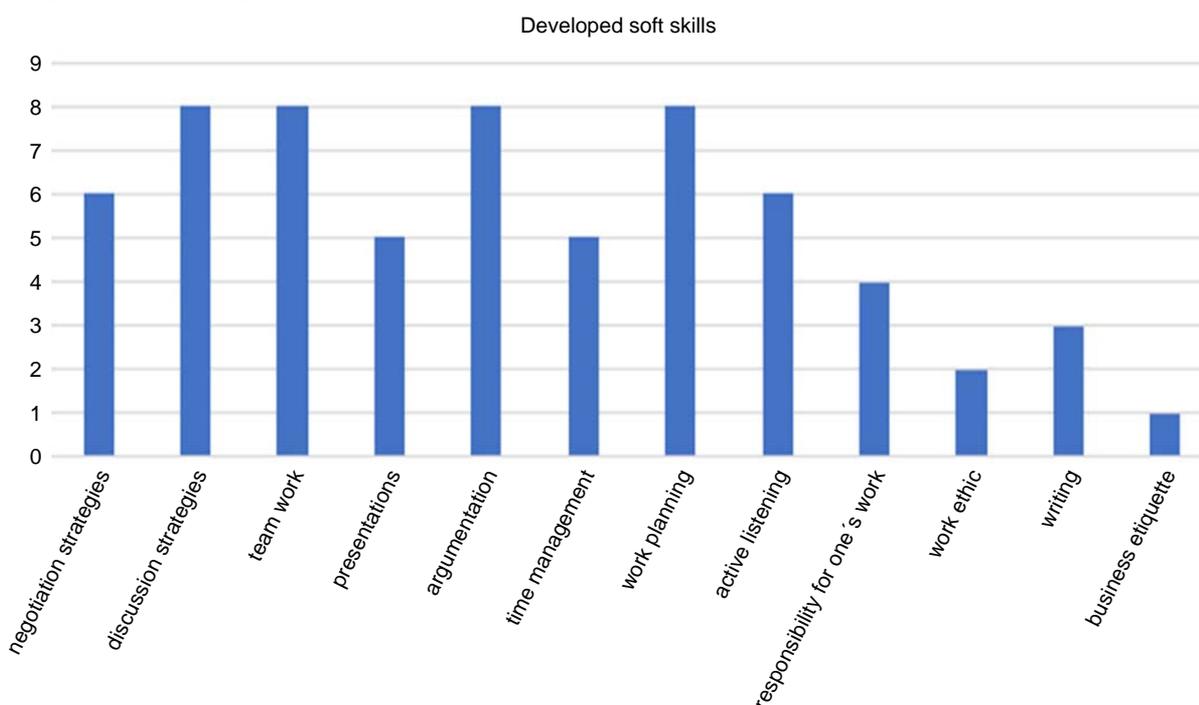
For the question concerning the frequency of introducing exercises oriented towards soft skills, seven teachers answered “once a month”, three answered “once every two weeks” and two answered “once a week”.

Part two – perspectives

In the first question, teachers were asked to give suggestions for developing soft skills in the LSP class (open question).

Only eleven teachers answered this question. Among the suggestions named by the participating teachers were several references to working with original data created in a professional environment and containing the element of expertise:

Figure 7. Skills developed in an LSP class



Source: author's findings.

- “confronting learners with original texts”,¹
- “simulations based on original data”,
- “cooperation with experts from a specific field”,
- “cooperation with a professional environment”.

The answers also included a suggestion of having more complex tasks in the form of a project:

- “develop bigger projects, also in cooperation with other institutions, countries”.

Developing materials that support soft skills training could be a real motivator and facilitator for many LSP teachers of languages other than English (this suggestion came from a French teacher).

Some of the participants of the survey highlighted the need for courses and training concerning subject content knowledge as an important factor in intensifying their soft skills training in the LSP class. Three teachers confirmed that they would spend more time on developing soft skills during their class, although they did not have any idea for how to do so. Another mentioned suggestion of the surveyed group was taking part in a special course devoted to the subject of soft skills.

The closed questions refer to the possibilities of integrating soft skills training in an LSP class. Twelve teachers declared that it is possible, three had doubts, three were not convinced and two rejected the idea.

In the last question, the teachers were asked about the possible positive effect that developing soft skills could have on the students’ future careers. The answers to the question are illustrated in figure 8.

According to the teachers, soft skills can be useful in the future lives of graduates, as they influence

different aspects of their professional careers. Only three teachers did not see any relation.

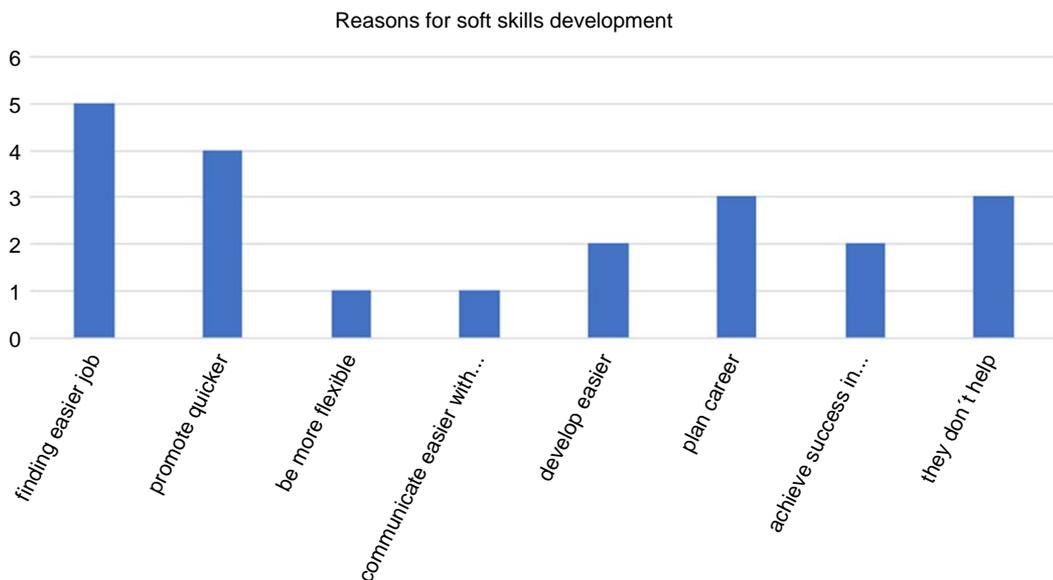
Conclusions

Soft skills, understood as individual skills making communication and cooperation in a professional environment easier through the application of assertiveness, creativity, understanding, stress resistance, etc., are dynamic, and their development is individually driven. Soft skills training in the LSP classroom gives a unique opportunity for developing soft skills in a company-like environment, with emphasis placed on individual needs.

However, the application of soft skills in an LSP course raises the need for developing specific methods and instruments supporting cooperation within both fields – LSP teaching and soft skills training. The described survey, designed as an introduction to more complex research, first presented considerations concerning the introduction of a soft skills training module as a part of LSP teaching. The answers of the teachers participating in the survey prove that integration is possible and needed, which is also confirmed by the research of Fischer-Kania (2008), Kwiecińska-Zdrenka (2012) and Tevdovska (2015). However, it requires the development of a special methodology, which can be concluded from the answers of the foreign language teachers participating in the survey.

The majority of teachers introduce exercises oriented towards soft skills once a month in an LSP class, which is a sign they have not developed appropriate strategies to encourage the development of their students’ soft skills potential on a regular basis. Soft skills develop-

Figure 8. Impact of soft skills on the future lives of graduates



Source: author’s findings.

¹ The answers were given in Polish and translated into English by the author.

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ment exercises do not last long and can be integrated into almost every activity. The most frequently trained skills named in the survey are discussions, teamwork, and developing argumentation strategies, whereas presentations, which are crucial to the corporate milieu, were mentioned by only five teachers. Writing is a relatively seldom-developed skill (mentioned by only three participants). The explanation of these results may stem from the fact that teachers do not know how to teach soft skills. This may be because they were not taught how to do so. Or, it may be because they have relatively little contact with the business sector. In some cases, they may not be aware of the importance of the development of certain soft skills, in contrast to the students, which may be the result of a lack of contact with a professional environment (Tevdovska, 2015). Relatively poor responses concerning the methods of developing soft skills (mainly based on course book exercises) support this conclusion and underline the need for topic-dedicated courses for teachers devoted to the methodology of the development of soft skills, which was also mentioned by the survey participants. The majority of the surveyed teachers see the need for and utility of developing soft skills.

The part of the survey that was devoted to the question of perspectives delivered information about possible methods of soft skills implementation and benefits and what they can offer in the classroom. According to the participants of the study, the creation of special materials to develop soft skills could be very helpful. Among the methods that could be implemented to develop soft skills, working with original texts was mentioned, as were more complex projects in cooperation with other institutions or countries.

Interestingly, the biggest benefit of developing soft skills in an LSP class that was named by the participants of the survey was finding a job. However, three participants stated that soft skills do not help at all in this matter, reflecting the ambiguity of opinions in this context.

The acquisition of skills at the university level – before commencing their professional careers – can make students more aware of the potential problems they may face and help them deal with them in the future, which is why it is worth considering the discussed directions for the specialization of LSP teaching at the university level.

The development of soft skills in ESP² is an important and interdisciplinary topic. The results of the survey strongly indicate the need for deeper analysis of its practical dimension. Due to editorial limitations, only some ideas from the given field can be presented in this paper, taking the form of tips for teachers to implement.

Soft skills training should primarily introduce authenticity and be tightly connected to a professional environment. This can be achieved through the use of authentic materials (emails, documents, corporate newsletters, etc.) or descriptions of authentic

situations (supported by figures and diagrams). Implementing the use of authentic materials provides contact with specific vocabulary used in real contexts, including situations related to corporate culture and intercultural differences. Plus, doing so often offers students initial contact with the layout of authentic documents. This should also be discussed in the classroom as a starting point for writing exercises.

A good and important point for planning soft skills development in the ESP classroom is the establishment of an authentic cooperation with representatives of the field (for example, graduates who are active in the labor market) or experts willing to share their experience. Cooperation with external specialists opens new perspectives for an interdisciplinary project and provides better insight into everyday life in the profession. There is a lack of materials combining subject-oriented issues and the training of soft skills, as these require a high workload from teachers, as well as constant updates of the subject content knowledge.

The development of soft skills can be supported by case-oriented teaching. One possible method of implementation is the use of authentic cases, based on real situations, and the encouragement of the development of problem-solving strategies and the argumentation and negotiation skills necessary to convince the rest of the group to choose the presented option.

A separate part of soft skills development requires students from different fields to deliver public speeches. For this, an adequate system of assessment and feedback is necessary. There is also a need for the introduction of argumentation strategies, in addition to necessary discourse markers.

The mentioned solutions are only exemplary suggestions signaled in the context of the discussed study and require further analysis.

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² This topic needs an extended description and will be the subject of a separate paper by the author.

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Abstract

The lack of knowledge of a foreign language for specific purposes and the increasing internationalization of domestic markets cause many communicative difficulties at the corporate level. Inefficient communication slows down decision-making processes and lowers the quality of services offered. In this respect, soft skills are gaining more and more importance in professional environments. Considering the need for providing a high level of foreign language even at the interview level, the idea of soft skills oriented LSP teaching can close the existing gap in employee training and enhance employees' chances for success in an international environment. This article presents results of a survey conducted among LSP teachers in Poland.

Keywords: soft skills, LSP, training, foreign language teaching strategies

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