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THE IMPACT OF SOFT SKILLS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TEACHER'S PERSONAL BRAND

Abstract

The competition in the modern education system is growing every year. Nowadays, to gain confidence in the professional field, it is important for teachers to express themselves by developing their personal brand. We understand the teacher's personal brand as the habit of being popular among colleagues and creating one's own professional and personal identity. In recent decades, the issue of the necessity for teachers to possess flexible skills in order to perform their professional duties has become increasingly pertinent. The research article examines the role of soft skills in shaping a teacher's personal brand, which has become a crucial aspect in contemporary professional settings. This study is based on theoretical frameworks of personal brand formation, complemented by practical observations and analysis of current demands placed on teachers. The authors posit that the identification of the structural components of soft skills, which are critical for the development of a teacher's personal brand, will facilitate this process by considering the specific attributes of the phenomenon

and the particularities of teachers' professional activities. The article identifies and delineates the structural components of soft skills, including self-presentation, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, leadership. To validate the proposed hypothesis, a survey was conducted using the digital platform Google Forms. The survey consisted of two stages: at the first stage, we surveyed respondents who were not teachers; they were asked 8 questions; At the second stage, teachers were interviewed and asked 5 questions. The analysis of the results indicates that the development of the identified soft skills contributes to the formation of a positive image of the teacher and significantly influences the enhancement of professional status, as well as the quality and efficiency of the educational process.

Keywords: personal brand development; Soft skills; teacher's personal brand; teacher; personal qualities; structure; Soft skills structure.

Introduction. The life of modern man is quite different from the life of the previous generation. Thus, the modern world has acquired a rapid pace of development, globalization and chaos: every day in the world scientific discoveries are made, technologies are changing, borders between states are increasingly erased, cultures are mixing, with superfast changes in the surrounding reality a person experiences anxiety and confusion. That is why it is very important nowadays for a person to possess soft skills that allow him to interact effectively with other people, to have leadership skills, to work successfully in the global society and to adapt to the dynamically changing conditions of both the world in general and the labor market in particular.

Therefore, the purpose of this research article is to identify the qualities of Soft skills that are important in the development of teacher's personal brand.

Based on the analysis of scientific literature, it should be noted that the topic of the research is currently not well studied. There are separate researches of both local and foreign scientists on the development of teacher's personal brand (Shklyeva, 2023) and on the problem of Soft skills in professional activity (Ivonina et al., 2017). The results of our survey, however, will make it possible to understand which qualities and skills related to Soft skills are significant for the development of a teacher's personal brand.

The obtained results can be useful not only for the existing and future teachers, but also for educational institutions that can use them to improve the professional training of students and develop their own staff.

Materials and methods. In order to achieve the set goal, let us dwell on the definition of the essence of the concept of «teacher's personal brand».

In contemporary circumstances of modernized changes in the educational space of all levels, the tendency to create a competitive environment becomes important. In this case, it is meant the relationship between people, characterized by the state of explicit or implicit struggle for power, love, prestige, recognition, material prosperity, and the realization of a person's inner potential.

The modern era puts new demands for the teacher to think about his success and competitiveness. In the transition to market relations, the teacher's personal position should change from the status of an ordinary passive performer, waiting for attention to his professional competencies, to the position of an active subject in the market of educational services, able to best manage his professional capital and find the most profitable areas of its application.

The situation in the educational environment itself determines the need to develop a personal brand in teachers. Unfortunately, modern teacher has to solve this problem alone, as neither the school, where his professional activity is realized, nor the educational institutions that provide his professional training are ready to solve this problem.

It is important to note that the specific approach to research methodology may vary depending on the specifics of the research itself and the subject area. The article should provide a detailed description of each of these stages with the indication of research methods and techniques.

Within the framework of this article we focus on one of the factors influencing the development of personal brand, Soft skills, assuming that knowledge about specific Soft skills will increase the effectiveness of the process of personal brand development in a teacher.

Speaking about the concept of Soft skills, it should be noted that it is a consequence of a dynamically changing world. Despite its relevance, there is no universally accepted definition in science yet. In translation from English Soft skills mean «soft», or, in another way, «flexible» skills. The Oxford Dictionary defines soft skills as «personal qualities that enable effective and harmonious interaction with other people» (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010).

Following the scientists, we believe that Soft skills are a set of non-specialized, career-important supraprofessional skills that are responsible for successful participation in the work process, high performance and are cross-cutting, i.e., not related to a specific subject area (Lippman et al., 2019).

The problem of soft skills development was studied by many scientists at different times, who considered and defined the concept of «soft skills» in different ways, which can be explained by the peculiarities of perception and the sphere of scientific interests of each of them. It should be noted that all existing definitions of the concept are partially interrelated and interdependent, and some of them are closely intertwined with each other.

The work of scientists, who substantiated the four-stage process of Soft skills transition from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence in the system of postgraduate education, is quite interesting. We consider it is important, when studying the relationship between soft skills and the development of teacher's personal brand, to identify the following levels of competence development: «unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, unconscious competence, conscious competence», which will allow us to talk about the level of development of teacher's personal brand. In our survey we take «unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence» as a low level, «unconscious competence» as a medium level, and «conscious competence» as a high level (Sultanova et al., 2020).

Based on the research, we hypothesize that based on the flexible skills identified in our research that are relevant to the personal brand

development process, we can further develop a model of teacher's personal brand development (Blessing et al., 2022).

As for the specifics of the activity process, and in our study, it is the development of personal brand, it is necessary to identify which Soft Skills are important for the development of teacher's personal brand.

Since the professional activity of a teacher represents the presence of professional competence of the teacher (teacher's product), learners and their parents (target audience) and colleagues (competitors), a personal brand will help the teacher to stand out in the modern competitive educational environment. Specific features of a teacher's personal brand is the ability to stand out among colleagues (competitors) and create an image that allows to cause trust and respect for his/her professional activity (product) among both the target audience and competitors (target audience). If competence in professional activity is skills related in a general sense to Hard skills, then flexible skills will include the skills to stand out, create an image, and possess skills of self-presentation.

Self-presentation (Latin *praesentantis* – presenting) is «the process of presenting oneself, one's qualities to other people in order to learn their opinion about oneself and to form one or another attitude towards oneself from others». Self-presentation is an important communication skill used by people of different status to form a certain image in the minds of others (Kalennikova & Borisevich, 2013).

The self-presentation of a teacher in pedagogical activity has been considered at various times by scientists who believe that in the process of implementing the discursive practice in self-presentation the ability to present oneself, to reveal one's personal qualities and characteristics is most clearly manifested, which allows to bring the real «self-concept» closer to the ideal one (Komina & Malysheva, 2014). In other words, self-presentation is one of the most important Soft skills that are significant in the development of teacher's personal brand.

In addition to professional merits, social significance of the results of pedagogical activity, the teacher's moral and personal

qualities are no less important skills for the development of teacher's personal brand. As the analysis of scientific literature shows, significant for the professional activity of a teacher, based on its characteristics, are such as: emotional intelligence (Pishghadam & et al., 2021), fairness (Upadhyay, 2016), creativity (Sorokina, 2022), leadership (Turgunbaeva & et al., 2016).

The study was conducted using a qualitative research method, which included two main stages: a survey of parents of students and a survey of teachers who possess a personal brand. The research model aimed to identify the importance of soft skills such as self-presentation, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, and leadership in the development of a teacher's personal brand.

The research model was designed to identify significant soft skills that contribute to the development of a teacher's personal brand and included two main stages.

Stage 1: Survey of Parents of Students

In the first stage of the study, a survey was conducted among the parents of students to determine whether the teachers, whom the parents perceive as having a personal brand, possess soft skills such as self-presentation, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, and leadership. To this end, 60 parents responded to 8 survey questions, which were hosted on the digital platform Google Forms. The survey allowed us to identify parents' perceptions of the importance of these soft skills for a successful teacher's personal brand.

Stage 2: Survey of Teachers with a Personal Brand

In the second stage, 15 teachers, identified by parents as possessing a personal brand, were surveyed. The survey consisted of 6 questions and aimed to determine the extent to which teachers themselves are aware of and develop the soft skills that contribute to their personal brand.

This two-stage approach not only allowed for an analysis of the significance of soft skills from the parents' perspective but also provided insights into how teachers perceive and develop these skills. The results obtained enabled a comparative analysis and allowed

conclusions to be drawn about the importance of these soft skills in the formation and maintenance of a teacher's personal brand.

The study involved 75 participants: 60 parents of students and 15 teachers who possess a personal brand. The parents' ages ranged from 29 to 47 years, with 48 women (80%) and 12 men (20%). The teachers' ages ranged from 33 to 51 years, with 14 women (93%) and 1 man (7%).

Data collection was conducted through surveys using the digital platform Google Forms. The survey for parents consisted of 8 questions, while the survey for teachers included 6 questions. The surveys allowed for the identification of the perception and importance of soft skills such as self-presentation, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, and leadership from both the parents' and teachers' perspectives.

In the first stage of the study, respondents (parents of students) were selected randomly. The aim of the survey was to determine whether the teachers mentioned by the parents possessed soft skills such as self-presentation, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, and leadership. In the second stage, the survey was conducted among the teachers identified by parents as possessing a personal brand. The goal of this stage was to understand how teachers recognize and develop these skills in the context of creating and maintaining their personal brand.

The comparison of data obtained from parents and teachers allowed for the analysis of the perception and significance of specific soft skills in the development of a teacher's personal brand. Agreement between the opinions of respondents from both groups confirmed the hypothesis regarding the importance of the identified soft skills.

All participants in the study were guaranteed confidentiality, as well as the protection of their rights and interests. Prior to the start of the study, a briefing was conducted with participants, informing them about the research process.

The results obtained were compared with the hypothesis and research questions. If the opinions of parents and teachers coincided, this confirmed the significance of certain soft skills in the development of a teacher's personal brand.

In the case of discrepancies, the hypothesis could be revised in light of new data.

Results. Analysis of the first survey responses showed that 56 people gave the correct answer

to the question «Choose the right definition of the concept «teacher’s personal brand», which is 93.3%, respectively, 4 people gave the wrong answer, which is 6.7% (Figure 1).

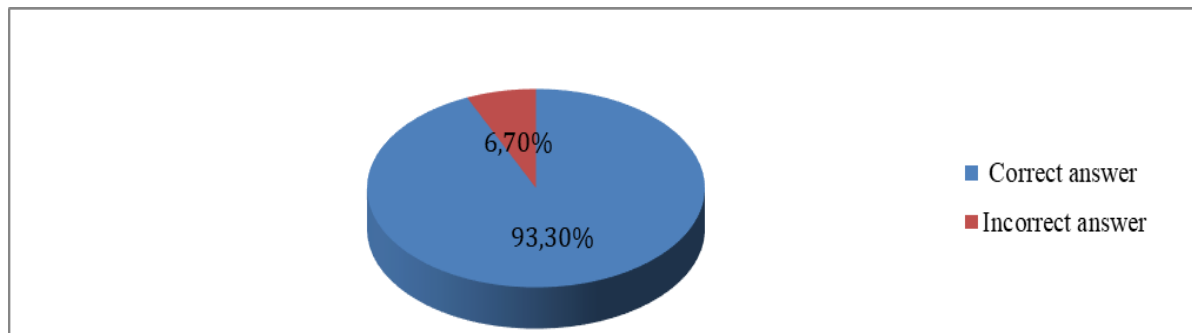


Figure 1: Respondents’ understanding of the term «Teacher’s personal brand»

Thus, we can conclude that respondents understand the term «teacher’s personal brand».

The second and third questions of the questionnaire provided us with information about teachers who, in the respondents’ opinion, have a personal brand. At the second stage, we contacted these teachers, interviewed them, and took their consent to participate in the experiment.

The analysis of respondents’ answers to the fourth question showed that 52 (86.7%) respondents believe that the teacher they mentioned possesses self-presentation skills, «do not possess» - 3 respondents (5%), «difficult to answer» - 5 respondents (8.3%).

The analysis of respondents’ answers to the fifth question: «In your opinion, does your teacher possess emotional intelligence» showed that 56 respondents (93.4%) answered «yes», 1 respondent (1.6%) answered «no»,

and 3 respondents (5%) answered «difficult to answer».

Respondents’ answers to question 6: «In your opinion, does the teacher you mentioned possess justice» gave the following results: «yes» - 51 respondents (85%), «no» - 2 respondents (3.4%), «difficult to answer» - 7 respondents (11.6%).

Respondents’ answers to the seventh question: «yes» - 55 (91.6%), «no» - 1 (1.6%), «difficult to answer» - 4 (6.8%).

Respondents’ answers to the last question: «yes» - 53 (88.4%), «no» - 1 (1.6%), «difficult to answer» - 6 (10%).

Thus, the results of the first stage of the survey confirm the validity of the Soft skills qualities and skills we have highlighted, which are important for the development of teacher’s personal brand.

The results are presented in Figure 2.

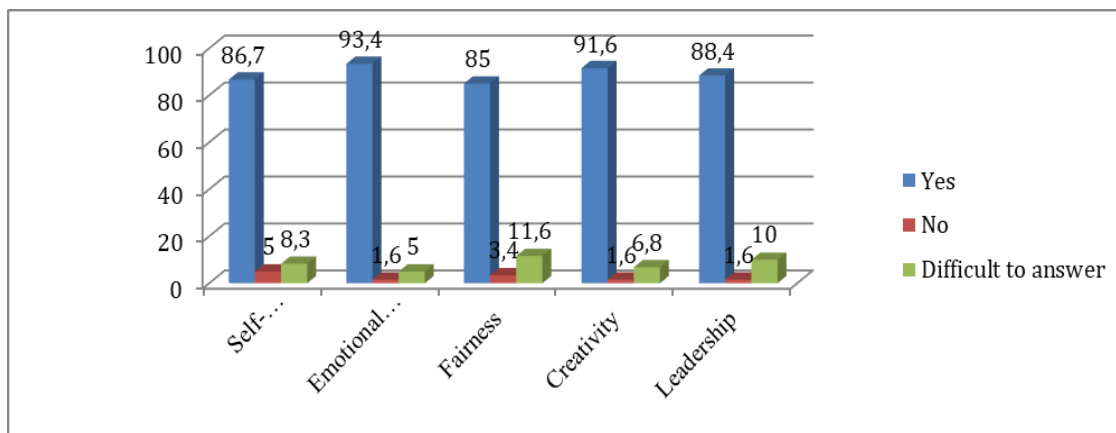


Figure 2: The degree of the intensity of Soft skills and qualities we have identified in teachers with personal brand

The second phase of the survey included the teachers who had been identified by the respondents in the first phase. They were asked to answer questions numbered 1,4,5,6,7,8,

designed in a new questionnaire, also prepared with the help of Google Forms.

The first question was answered correctly by 99% and incorrectly by 1% (Figure 3).

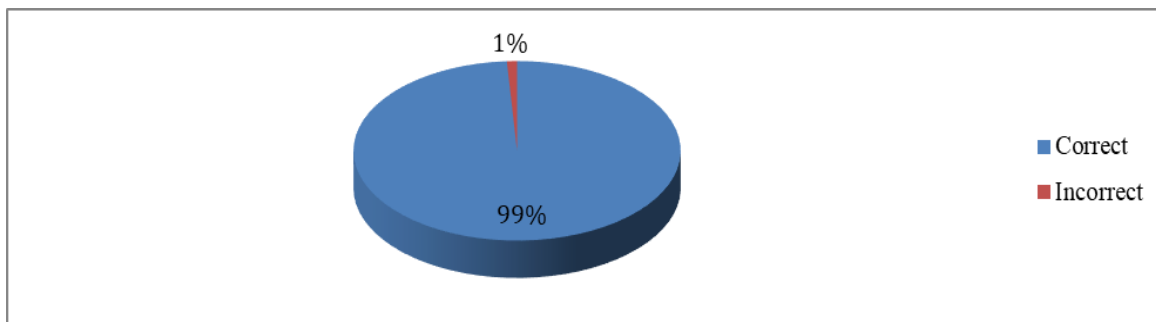


Figure 3: Respondents' (teachers') understanding of the term «teacher's personal brand»

To the question «In your opinion, do you possess self-presentation skills»: «yes» - 13 (86.7%), «no» - no answers (0%), «difficult to answer» - 2 (13.3%).

To the question «Do you possess, in your opinion, emotional intelligence»: «yes» - 14 (93.3%), «no» - no answers (0%), «I find it difficult to answer» - 1 (6.7%)

To the question «In your opinion, do you possess justice»: «yes» - 15 (100%).

To the question «Do you possess, in your opinion, creativity»: «yes» - 13 (86.7%), «no» - not specified (0%), «difficult to answer» - 2 (13.3%).

To the last question «Do you possess, in your opinion, leadership»: «yes» - 10 (66.7%), «no» - 1 (6.7%), «difficult to answer» - 4 (26.6%).

Thus, we can clearly see that the responses of teachers with a personal brand are close to other respondents' answers (Figure 4).

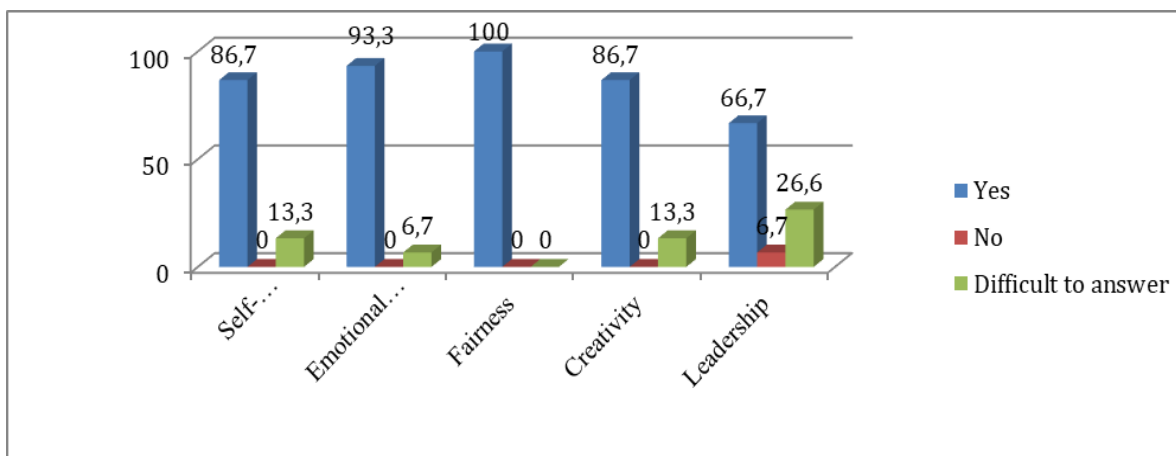


Figure 4: The degree of expressiveness of highlighted Soft skills and qualities in teachers with personal brand. The results of the teachers' survey

Discussion. The investigation of the specific abilities and characteristics encompassed within the domain of soft skills remains a contentious area within the academic discourse. With regard to the attainment of soft skills, our research aligns with the perspective of Susan A. Dean Walden and Julia I. East of Walden

University, who posit that the acquisition of hard skills is significantly more straightforward and expeditious than the mastery of soft skills (Dean & East, 2019).

The identification of the skills and qualities that comprise soft skills remains a topic of ongoing debate among scholars. It is our

contention that the specific set of skills and qualities required to perform a given task varies depending on the task itself. Nevertheless, certain soft skills are considered universal, including creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Tazhenova & et al., 2024).

In the context of this study, the views of scientists are of particular importance, which emphasize the specificity of the teaching profession and identify a number of essential soft skills for teachers, including assertiveness, networking abilities, teamwork, sensitivity, socialisation, action orientation, the ability to work under pressure, and social desirability (Karaolis, 2019).

In considering the role of soft skills in the development of a teacher's personal brand, it is important to recognise that the very nature of the phenomenon, namely the teacher's personal brand, necessitates the possession of certain qualities and soft skills by teachers. The extent to which these soft skills are demonstrated affects the formation of a teacher's personal brand. A review of the academic literature revealed that the following soft skills were identified as influential in the development of a teacher's personal brand: self-presentation skills, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, and leadership.

Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to emphasize the correlation between soft skills and personal branding. Soft skills assist teachers in creating a positive impression on others, fostering trust, and establishing effective relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administration.

In our study, we identified a number of soft skills, including self-presentation skills, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity, and leadership, among teachers with well-developed personal brands.

The incorporation of self-presentation skills into the framework of personal branding is substantiated by the scholarship by scientists. In accordance with the perspectives of these scholars, we concur that self-presentation enables teachers to effectively represent themselves and their activities, fostering trusting relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. The capacity to articulate ideas

with clarity and assurance not only enhances the authority of teachers but also serves as a model for emulation (Zinko & Rubin, 2015).

The research conducted by Gradinaru and et al. (2020), is dedicated to the mastery of emotional intelligence with the objective of creating a personal brand. The essence of their findings can be likened to the manner in which a skilled artist employs a variety of shades to create a masterpiece. Similarly, teachers must navigate emotions and relationships in order to demonstrate their unique individuality. The assertions made by these researchers provide grounds for the argument that a personal brand constitutes reputation and renown, necessitating educators to set goals and chart a developmental trajectory.

By fostering authentic connections, enhancing communicative skills, and demonstrating resilience, professionals can elevate their professional presence and craft an appealing personal brand. It is our contention that any discussion of a teacher's personal brand must be aligned with these attributes.

This assertion is supported by the conclusions drawn by scientists, who assert in their works that objectivity and impartiality in evaluating students' actions and behaviours form the cornerstone of trust and respect toward the teacher. Teachers who are perceived as fair are better able to maintain equilibrium in the classroom, uphold discipline, and motivate students to achieve high standards. The results obtained in the study support the theory of social justice: everyone should be given equal opportunities and resources. Such teachers are preferred by students (Habib and et al., 2024).

Jugen Salenbacher (2013) has discussed the significance of creativity as a pivotal aspect of personal branding, emphasizing its role in rendering education more captivating and memorable. Creativity empowers individuals to devise unconventional solutions and swiftly adapt to evolving circumstances.

We concur with the view that leadership competencies facilitate the inspiration and motivation of others, directing them towards the achievement of shared objectives. Leaders are able to cultivate team cohesion, promote collaboration, and maintain a high level of interaction among all stakeholders (Milovanovic and et al., 2015).

The findings of our survey offer substantial support for the contention that the identified soft skills attributes and proficiencies are instrumental in shaping a teacher's personal brand. Both phases of the survey yielded consistent results, with a prevalence of positive responses from respondents exceeding 85%. This provides further evidence to validate our hypothesis.

The results of this study have the potential to inform the development of training initiatives or workshops designed to enhance a teacher's personal brand. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that the sample size limits the strength of our conclusions. Consequently, the study's outcomes should be interpreted with caution in light of its limitations. It is also noteworthy that the research did not include prospective teachers. Consequently, further investigation involving this demographic is required to deepen our understanding of the relationship between soft skills and the development of a teacher's personal brand.

Conclusion. Summarizing all of the above, we can conclude that there is no universally accepted definition of the concept of «teacher's

personal brand» in science. In our study, we understand it as the ability to stand out among colleagues and create one's professional and personal identity.

Talking about Soft skills, we understand it as a set of non-specialized, career-important supraprofessional skills that are responsible for successful participation in the work process, high performance and are cross-cutting, i.e., not related to a specific subject area. Based on the empirical findings, we can conclude that the influence of Soft skills on the development of teacher's personal brand is significant. The qualities and skills identified by the respondents are categorized as significant and having a significant impact on the development of teacher's personal brand. The authors recommend teachers to pay more attention to the development of such Soft skills as self-presentation, emotional intelligence, fairness, creativity and leadership, as well as the organization of targeted methodological work in schools to develop these skills that contribute to the improvement of the unique image of teachers.

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