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DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS BASED ON NATIONAL VALUES

Abstract

In modern education, the development of soft skills among primary school students is of particular importance, as these skills contribute to their successful social adaptation, cognitive development and personal growth. This study is aimed at identifying opportunities for integrating national values into the process of forming soft skills in primary school students. The analysis of educational strategies of the countries (Finland, Japan, South Korea, USA, China, India) is carried out and the experience of the Republic of Kazakhstan in this context is considered. The key national values of Kazakhstan (language, traditions, family values, historical memory, national games, religious and spiritual norms, respect for nature) and their impact on the development of soft skills such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, communicative and social abilities are identified. The research is based on the methods of conceptual analysis, comparative analysis of educational systems, and methods of systematization and classification. In the course of the work, effective pedagogical methods were identified, including project-based learning with an ethnocultural component, role-playing, mentoring, folk games and the study of national literature. The results of the study confirm that the inclusion of national values in the educational process not only promotes the development of soft skills, but also strengthens the national identity of students, making their education more meaningful and appropriate to the socio-cultural context of Kazakhstan. The results obtained can be useful for teachers, methodologists and developers of educational programs when creating innovative methods for the formation of soft skills in younger schoolchildren.

Keywords: soft skills, primary education, national values, pedagogical approaches, primary school students, critical thinking, emotional intelligence.

Introduction. In the context of rapid changes in society and the education system, there is an increasing need for students to develop not only academic knowledge, but also flexible skills such as critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, emotional intelligence, and teamwork. These competencies help a person adapt to new challenges, find original solutions, and interact effectively with others (Hrona et al., 2022; Bilous, 2024).

It is especially important to develop these skills from an early age, since it is in the primary school period that key personal characteristics, models of social interaction and basic cognitive abilities are laid (D'isanto et al., 2022; Linnik et al., 2022). Early development of soft skills has a long-term impact on a child's academic achievements, future career prospects, and

personal well-being (Feraco et al., 2023; Saduakas & Abdurakhmanova, 2024).

At the same time, many educational systems focus on universal methods of forming soft skills, without taking into account the cultural and national characteristics of students. However, modern research in pedagogy and psychology confirms that it is through national values that students can most effectively develop flexible skills (Okada et al., 2024). National values play a key role in the process of a child's socialization and shape his worldview, behavioral attitudes and style of interaction with others. The inclusion of national traditions and cultural norms in the educational process makes learning more meaningful and motivating, as children from an early age begin to realize the connection between their own skills and the

historical and cultural heritage of their country (Fadlin et al., 2024).

In countries such as Finland, Japan and South Korea, national values are actively integrated into curricula, contributing to the development of key competencies of the 21st century (OECD, 2018). Thus, in Japan, considerable attention is paid to fostering collective responsibility, respect and harmony, which contributes to the development of cooperation and communication skills among children (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2006). In Finland, national education policy is focused on developing students' autonomy and creativity through project-based learning based on national values of equality and social justice (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016).

In the educational system of Kazakhstan, national values are an integral element of the upbringing of the younger generation, which is enshrined in strategic documents such as the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, the Rukhani Zhangyru program and the State Mandatory Standard of Primary Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to these documents, national identity must be combined with global competitiveness, which requires students not only to have academic knowledge, but also to have developed soft skills such as critical thinking, leadership, emotional intelligence and sociability.

Despite the importance of this problem, effective methods of integrating national values into the process of soft skills formation have not yet been sufficiently developed in the educational practice of Kazakhstan. In this regard, there is a need to develop pedagogical approaches based on national cultural traditions that will combine traditional forms of education with modern educational technologies.

The purpose of this study is to identify and substantiate effective pedagogical approaches to the formation of flexible skills in primary school students based on national values.

Research question: "How can national values contribute to the development of soft skills in younger schoolchildren?"

Materials and Methods. The research is *theoretical and analytical* and is aimed

at studying the influence of national values on the development of soft skills in younger schoolchildren.

Methods of conceptual analysis, comparative analysis of educational systems, as well as systematization and classification of pedagogical approaches were used:

1. The conceptual analysis allowed us to study key pedagogical and psychological theories that consider the formation of soft skills in primary school children.

2. The comparative analysis was used to study the educational systems of Finland, Japan, South Korea, the USA, China and India, which revealed strategies for the formation of soft skills in countries with different cultural traditions.

3. The method of systematization and classification was used to structure pedagogical approaches aimed at developing soft skills through national values, which made it possible to determine the most effective strategies for their inclusion in the educational program.

The study was conducted in *three stages*. At the first stage, an analysis of scientific literature and educational standards was carried out, which made it possible to identify key national values that contribute to the development of soft skills among younger schoolchildren. The second stage included a comparative analysis of international experience, which made it possible to identify the most effective educational strategies used in different countries. At the final stage, the systematization of the data obtained was carried out, as a result of which specific pedagogical methods adapted for the educational system of Kazakhstan were proposed.

Results. The analysis showed that the development of soft skills in younger schoolchildren plays a key role in their cognitive, social and emotional development. Modern research emphasizes that soft skills are a set of universal competencies that include communication skills, critical thinking, emotional intelligence and cooperative skills, which makes them an integral element of successful learning and socialization of students (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

Unlike hard skills, which are associated with the acquisition of academic knowledge

and the development of specific skills, soft skills provide the basis for long-term personal and professional growth, as well as contribute to the formation of self-confidence and social competence (Durlak et al., 2011). These skills are developed through a variety of educational practices aimed at active interaction, learning through practical experience, and the inclusion

of cultural values in the learning process (Brackett et al., 2012).

Based on the analysis of various approaches to the development of soft skills in younger schoolchildren, a classification was formed, presented in Table 1, which highlights the main components of soft skills, their content and impact on the development of primary school children.

Table 1. *The content of soft skills in primary school students*

Component	Content	Impact on the development of primary school students
<i>Cognitive</i>	Critical thinking, problem solving, analytical skills	Development of the ability to analyze information, to find non-standard solutions
<i>Communicative</i>	Ability to express thoughts, active listening, group interaction	Improvement of speech skills, development of social confidence
<i>Emotional</i>	Empathy, emotion management, stress tolerance	Increased psychological stability, formation of emotional intelligence
<i>Social</i>	Cooperation, teamwork, adaptation in a team	Improvement of social ties, improvement of the ability to cooperate

Research shows that the cognitive component of soft skills is the basis for successful learning and solving complex tasks. The development of critical thinking and analytical abilities allows students to apply the acquired knowledge in real situations, which contributes to their independence and cognitive activity (Diamond & Lee, 2011). The use of active learning methods, such as project activities and game technologies, has a positive effect on the formation of cognitive flexibility and adaptability to changing conditions of the educational environment (Durlak et al., 2011).

The communicative component plays an important role in developing students' ability to express their thoughts, listen and understand their interlocutors, and interact effectively in a team. It has been proven that children with highly developed communication skills demonstrate greater self-confidence, adapt better to the school environment, and take initiative in learning processes (Jethava et al., 2022). The development of this group of soft skills at an early age contributes to the formation of leadership qualities and the ability for constructive dialogue in a child (Denham, 2006).

The emotional component of soft skills is closely related to the formation of the ability of primary school students to self-regulation,

emotion management and stress tolerance. Research shows that children who have mastered emotional self-regulation strategies cope more easily with learning difficulties, experience less anxiety, and form more stable interpersonal relationships (Surzykiewicz et al., 2022). Practices aimed at developing the emotional component of soft skills include role-playing games, emotion management exercises, group discussions, and mindfulness techniques. Research confirms that such methods help to increase the level of self-control in children, improve their ability to empathize and form a positive attitude towards conflict resolution.

The social component includes the skills of cooperation, teamwork and adaptation in a team. The development of these abilities contributes to the formation of such important personal qualities as tolerance, respect for others, and the ability to find compromises in group activities (Vanhove et al., 2023).

An analysis of educational systems in various countries confirms that national values have a significant impact on the methods of soft skills formation in younger schoolchildren. A comparison of the approaches implemented in Finland, Japan, South Korea, the USA, China, and India revealed differences in strategies for

their integration into the educational process due to the historical, cultural, and social characteristics of each country. To systematize international experience, Table 2 is presented, reflecting the influence of national values on the development of soft skills.

Table 2. *Integration of soft skills into the educational process of different countries based on national values*

Country	National values	Approaches to the development of soft skills	Examples of implementation in primary schools
<i>Finland</i> (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016)	Equality, trust, personal autonomy	Project-based learning, teamwork, student self-management	Individual learning trajectories, joint student projects, reflection after completing assignments
<i>Japan</i> (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2006)	Discipline, teamwork, respect for elders	Collective learning, rituals of interaction, team projects	Work in Han groups (small groups of students who jointly perform various educational and social tasks), collective classroom cleaning, joint problem-solving activities
<i>South Korea</i> (Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, 2015)	Diligence, respect for knowledge, collective responsibility	Intensive learning, technology integration into the educational process, group work	Group homework, digital educational platforms, mutual mentoring programs between students
<i>USA</i> (National Governors Association & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)	Individualism, initiative, leadership, creativity	Project-based learning, inclusive teaching methods, development of creative thinking, development of entrepreneurial competencies	Work on startups in elementary grades, STEAM education, debate clubs, individual presentations and public speaking
<i>China</i> (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009)	Harmony, teamwork, respect for traditions, hard work	Group work, mentoring, social initiatives, learning through rituals	Compulsory student participation in community projects, mentoring between older and younger students, joint school projects, collective morning rituals
<i>India</i> (Central Board of Secondary Education [CBSE], India, 2012)	Spirituality, family values, respect for the teacher (Guru)	Meditations, mentoring, learning through stories	The use of myths and stories in the educational process, group discussions about morality, morning meditations before classes

The results of a comparative analysis of educational strategies revealed the differences between individualistic and collectivistic learning systems. The educational approaches used in Finland and the USA are aimed at developing independence, initiative and creativity, while in China, Japan and South Korea the emphasis is on collective responsibility, respect for elders and harmony in society. In India and China, special attention is paid to spiritual and moral values, which has a significant impact on the formation of emotional intelligence, empathy and reflection among students.

The Kazakh educational system is focused on fostering a harmoniously developed personality, which is enshrined in such strategic documents as Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy, the Rukhani Zhangyru Program and the State Mandatory Standard of Primary Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to the Program “Rukhani Zhangyru”, national identity should be combined with global competitiveness, which requires students not only academic knowledge, but also developed soft skills, including critical thinking, leadership skills, emotional intelligence and communication

skills. The State Mandatory Standard of Primary Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2022) emphasizes the importance of including cultural, historical and national values in the educational process, which contributes to the formation of a personality capable of adapting to society, showing initiative and awareness.

Based on the analysis of the national values of Kazakhstan, the key aspects of their influence on the formation of soft skills in younger schoolchildren have been identified. Table 3 shows the main national values of Kazakhstan, their content, examples of educational implementation and soft skills being developed.

Table 3. *Development of soft skills of primary school students based on national values of Kazakhstan*

National value	Content	Implementation examples	Developed soft skills
<i>Language</i>	Acquisition of the Kazakh language, study of traditional texts, folklore.	Discussions in the Kazakh language, the study of proverbs and sayings, theatrical performances.	Critical thinking, self-expression, communication skills.
<i>Traditions and customs</i>	Knowledge of national holidays, traditions and family customs.	Celebrating Nauryz at school, participating in dramatizations of traditional rituals.	Empathy, cooperation, respect for cultural diversity.
<i>Historical memory</i>	The study of the heroes of Kazakh history, folk tales and legends.	Role-playing games based on historical events, quests on the history of Kazakhstan.	Leadership, confidence, strategic thinking.
<i>Family values</i>	Respect for elders, respect for parents, knowledge of ancestry.	Educational conversations, essays about family, participation in family events.	Responsibility, tolerance, social intelligence.
<i>National Games</i>	Traditional Kazakh games (assyk, togыз-kumalak).	Organization of competitions, collective games for cohesion.	Teamwork, tactical thinking, coordination.
<i>Religious and spiritual values</i>	Respect for spiritual heritage, tolerance.	Educational hours, discussion of philosophical issues, study of moral and ethical norms.	Self-reflection, self-control, emotional stability.
<i>Respect for nature</i>	Respect for the environment, ecological awareness.	Environmental projects, tree planting, nature observation.	Responsibility, initiative, environmental literacy.

Special attention is paid to the fact that the formation of soft skills through national values allows younger schoolchildren to develop empathy, tolerance, social responsibility and cooperation skills, which is especially important in a multinational society in Kazakhstan.

As a result of the research, promising pedagogical strategies have also been identified that contribute to the development of soft skills among younger schoolchildren in the Kazakh context. Among them are project-based learning with an ethnocultural component, role-playing, mentoring, the use of folk traditions and Kazakh games, the study of national literature and proverbs.

An analysis of educational practice in Kazakhstan has shown that national-value-oriented training programs contribute to the

development of communicative, cognitive, emotional and social skills. In addition, they increase academic motivation, strengthen national identity and the conscious inclusion of schoolchildren in the educational process.

Thus, the revealed results indicate that the combination of traditional educational practices with modern pedagogical technologies is a promising direction for the development of education, ensuring the harmonious development of students and their adaptation to the requirements of the 21st century.

Discussion. The results obtained confirm the importance of the formation of soft skills in younger schoolchildren and demonstrate that national values are an effective tool for their development. The inclusion of cultural traditions, language, historical memory and

family foundations in the educational process not only contributes to the socialization of students, but also strengthens their cognitive, communicative, emotional and social competencies. These results are consistent with existing studies confirming that soft skills are formed most effectively in a socio-cultural context corresponding to the national identity of students. In international educational systems such as Finnish, Japanese or South Korean, national traditions and cultural norms are actively used in educational programs, which contributes to the development of children's social responsibility, leadership skills and emotional intelligence. An analysis of foreign practices has shown that in countries with an individualistic educational model (Finland, USA), key attention is paid to the development of autonomy, critical thinking and initiative through project-based learning and creative assignments, whereas in countries with a collectivist model (Japan, China, South Korea), the emphasis is on fostering discipline, teamwork and respect for seniors through a system of group assignments, mentoring, and ritualized forms of interaction. In this context, Kazakhstan's approach can combine elements of both models, ensuring a balance between the individual development of students and the formation of collective values.

The results of the analysis confirm that the development of soft skills through national values in the educational process of Kazakhstan can be effectively implemented through the use of ethnocultural techniques aimed at the cognitive, communicative and emotional development of children. For example, the use of the Kazakh language not only contributes to the development of speech and communication skills, but also forms students' ability to think critically, comprehend national heritage and realize their own cultural identity. Role-playing games and theatrical performances based on national legends and historical events contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, empathy and leadership skills, allowing children to learn social behavior patterns in practice. Mentoring, which is widely used in Kazakh villages, can be adapted to the

school environment in the form of inter-age education, where older students help younger students master both academic and social skills. The inclusion of folk games such as "assyk atu" and "togyzkumalak" forms strategic thinking, patience, coordination and the ability to cooperate, which is especially important for the development of teamwork and social adaptation.

A comparison of the revealed results with international studies confirms that the inclusion of national values in the educational process can be an effective tool for the formation of soft skills. In countries with high educational performance, such as Finland, national values are integrated through learning projects, an interdisciplinary approach, and autonomous learning, which promotes creative and critical thinking. In Japan, the system of collective interaction (for example, the Han group system) educates children's ability to cooperate, be responsible and respect the norms of society, which correlates with the Kazakh traditions of collective education. In the Chinese educational system, education is based on the principles of Confucian philosophy, according to which respect for traditions, diligence and harmony are the basis of education. These principles largely coincide with the Kazakh educational tradition, focused on combining spiritual and moral values with modern educational technologies. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the adaptation of national values in school education not only forms students' soft skills, but also strengthens their motivation to learn, which is an important factor in their academic and social success.

The practical significance of the results obtained lies in the fact that the identified methods and pedagogical strategies can be integrated into the educational process of primary schools to form soft skills in younger students. The introduction of national values into curricula makes it possible to create a more motivating educational environment in which children realize the importance of the subjects studied not only in terms of academic success, but also their connection with cultural traditions and national heritage. In the context of modernizing education in Kazakhstan, the introduction of such

approaches can contribute to the development of key 21st century competencies among students, including creativity, emotional intelligence, communication and social skills. The use of role-playing games, project-based learning, mentoring, and ethno-cultural components in the learning process can also increase student engagement, interest in learning, and self-development.

One of the most important aspects of the practical implementation of the revealed results is the development of methodological recommendations for primary school teachers aimed at effectively integrating national values into the process of soft skills formation. Thematic weeks dedicated to national culture, interactive classes on history, literature and the Kazakh language can be organized in educational institutions, as well as mentoring practices between students of different age groups. In addition, it is important to take into account the individual characteristics of each child and create conditions for inclusive education in which each student can develop their skills in accordance with their personal needs and interests.

Thus, the analysis demonstrates that the inclusion of national values in the educational process is not only an effective tool for the formation of soft skills in younger schoolchildren, but also a way to preserve and strengthen national identity. The results obtained can serve as a basis for further research aimed at developing specific educational programs and techniques that integrate ethnocultural elements into the educational process.

Conclusion. In the course of the study, the importance of national values in the formation of soft skills among younger schoolchildren was identified and substantiated. An analysis of existing pedagogical approaches and educational strategies has revealed that soft skills, including critical thinking, communication skills, emotional intelligence and cooperative skills, are an integral part of successful learning and social adaptation of students. At the same time, traditional educational methods do not sufficiently take into account the socio-cultural context in which the child's development takes

place. A comparative analysis of international experience has confirmed that in countries with a developed educational system, national values play a key role in education and training. In Finland, autonomy and equality promote critical thinking and individual responsibility. In Japan and South Korea, collective traditions create a favorable environment for the development of teamwork skills and social adaptation. In the USA and China, educational strategies are aimed at developing entrepreneurial thinking, independence and initiative. The experience of these countries shows that the integration of cultural values into the educational process contributes not only to the development of soft skills, but also to the strengthening of students' national identity.

The results of the study confirmed that Kazakhstan's national values, such as language, traditions, historical memory, family values, respect for nature and spiritual norms, have high educational potential and can be effectively used to form soft skills in younger schoolchildren. These values form children's emotional stability, communication skills, social responsibility, and self-confidence. Methods of integrating national heritage into the educational process, such as project-based learning with an ethnocultural component, role-playing, mentoring, folk traditions and national games, have proven effective in developing key competencies of the 21st century. The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that the identified pedagogical strategies and methods can be used in educational institutions of Kazakhstan to improve curricula. The inclusion of national values in the educational process contributes to the creation of a more motivating learning environment in which students realize the connection between their knowledge, cultural heritage and personal development. This not only promotes the development of soft skills, but also creates awareness of national identity, increases educational motivation and strengthens the link between traditional pedagogy and modern educational trends. Thus, the results of the study confirm that the inclusion of national values in the learning process of younger schoolchildren contributes to the development of their soft

skills, making the educational process more meaningful and effective. Further research may be aimed at developing specific methodological recommendations, educational programs and teaching materials that integrate ethnocultural elements into the educational process. In the

context of globalization and modernization of education, such a combination of traditions and modern educational technologies can become an important factor in the successful development of the primary education system in Kazakhstan.

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