

## THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A CONCEPT FOR ENHANCING SOFT SKILLS IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN NON-PHILOLOGICAL PROGRAMMES: APPROACHES AND PRINCIPLES

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**Abstract.** This article examines the theoretical foundations of a concept for enhancing soft skills in teaching English in non-philological programmes. The study is theoretical and conceptual in nature and is based on the analysis of relevant literature and methodological sources. The article identifies the andragogical, competency-based, and activity-based approaches as the main methodological foundation of the concept and formulates key principles such as outcome orientation, integration of language and soft skills, professional relevance, collaboration, reflection, and scaffolding. It is concluded that this framework can support the systematic development of both linguistic competence and transferable skills in higher education.

**Keywords:** soft skills, English language teaching, non-philological programmes, conceptual framework, andragogical approach, competency-based approach, activity-based approach, independent learning.

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqolada nofilologik dasturlarda ingliz tilini o'qitishda yumshoq ko'nikmalarni takomillashtirish konsepsiyasining nazariy asoslari ko'rib chiqiladi. Tadqiqot nazariy-konseptual xarakterga ega bo'lib, tegishli adabiyotlar va metodik manbalar tahliliga asoslangan. Maqolada andragogik, kompetensiyaviy va faoliyatga asoslangan yondashuvlar konsepsiyaning asosiy metodologik asosi sifatida belgilanib, natijaga yo'naltirilganlik, til va yumshoq ko'nikmalar integratsiyasi, kasbiy dolzarblik, hamkorlik, refleksiya va asoslash kabi asosiy tamoyillar shakllantirilgan. Ushbu tuzilma oliy ta'limda ham lingvistik kompetensiyani, ham transfer ko'nikmalarni tizimli rivojlantirishni qo'llab-quvvatlashi mumkin, degan xulosaga kelindi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** soft skills, ingliz tilini o'qitish, nofilologik dasturlar, konseptual asos, andragogik yondashuv, kompetensiyaviy yondashuv, faoliyatga asoslangan yondashuv, mustaqil ta'lim.

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические основы концепции совершенствования soft skills в преподавании английского языка в нефилологических программах. Исследование носит теоретико-концептуальный характер и основано на анализе соответствующей литературы и методологических источников. В статье андрагогический, компетентностный и деятельностный подходы определены как основная методологическая основа концепции, а также сформулированы ключевые принципы, такие как ориентация на результат, интеграция языковых и программных навыков, профессиональная релевантность, сотрудничество, рефлексия и эффективность. Сделан вывод о том, что эта структура может способствовать систематическому развитию как лингвистической компетенции, так и передаваемых навыков в высшем образовании.

**Ключевые слова:** soft skills, обучение английскому языку, нефилологические программы, концептуальная основа, андрагогический подход, компетентностный подход, деятельностный подход, самостоятельное обучение.

**Introduction.** The relevance of soft skills in higher education has increased significantly in recent years because labour markets no longer value disciplinary knowledge alone. Current global evidence shows that employers attach growing importance to analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, leadership, communication, and social influence, while youth-employment analyses continue to stress the need for stronger

transferable skills for successful transition into work. This makes soft skills development a strategic educational priority rather than an optional supplement.

Within this context, English teaching in non-philological programmes should not be understood only as the development of grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills. Curriculum scholarship increasingly treats curriculum as the core of the educational system because it determines content, teaching, learning, and assessment. In parallel, the Council of Europe's language education framework views learners as social agents who engage not only in reception and production but also in interaction and mediation, both of which are closely linked to collaboration, meaning-making, and communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This broader view opens a strong theoretical space for integrating soft skills into English language education.

At the same time, recent higher education research shows that the most frequently discussed soft skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, adaptability, and leadership, and that these skills are best developed when they are embedded in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment rather than taught as isolated add-ons. Systematic review evidence also indicates that soft-skills interventions are most meaningful when they are integrated into educational programmes through purposeful instructional design.

Against this background, the central problem is not only *why* soft skills should be enhanced, but *how* this process should be theoretically grounded. Before constructing an applied model for enhancing soft skills through independent learning in English classes, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual and methodological foundations of such a model. The aim of this article, therefore, is to substantiate the theoretical foundations of a concept for enhancing soft skills in teaching English in non-philological programmes and to identify the approaches and principles that should structure that concept.

**Materials and Methods.** This study is theoretical and conceptual in design. It relies on qualitative analysis of pedagogical, methodological, and curriculum-oriented literature related to soft skills, higher education, curriculum design, adult learning, competency-based education, and contemporary language teaching. The study also draws on recent policy and framework documents that emphasize learner-centred curriculum, social action in language learning, employability, and the integration of transferable competencies into higher education.

The methodological procedures used in the study were analysis, comparison, abstraction, synthesis, and conceptual modelling. At the analytical level, the article distinguishes between the notions of *concept* and *approach*. In this study, a *concept* is understood as a structured solution model that integrates aims, content, mechanisms, conditions, and indicators into a coherent system. An *approach*, by contrast, is treated as a methodological lens that determines the logic according to which the phenomenon is interpreted and educational design decisions are made. From this perspective, the study

does not treat communicative, task-based, problem-based, integrative, or intercultural approaches as the primary methodological foundation of the concept. Instead, these are viewed as instructional and methodological mechanisms through which the broader didactic foundation is operationalized in classroom and independent-learning practice.

**Results.** *Concept and approach as different methodological constructs*

A major theoretical outcome of the study is the clarification that the notions of *concept* and *approach* should not be conflated. A concept answers the questions: *What is being constructed? How does it function? What components does it include? What results does it aim to produce?* An approach answers a different question: *According to what methodological logic should the phenomenon be interpreted and educational practice designed?* This distinction is important because a concept that is not grounded in an explicit approach risks remaining merely descriptive or declarative. In contrast, a concept that is linked to a methodological basis gains internal coherence, operational clarity, and evaluative potential.

*Criteria for selecting the methodological foundation.* The selection of approaches in this study was guided by several criteria: the nature of the research problem, the expected educational outcomes, the characteristics of the learner group, the higher-education context, the possibility of operationalizing principles into practice, and the need for methodological consistency. Since the purpose of the proposed concept is to design a system for enhancing soft skills within English teaching in non-philological programmes, the most appropriate foundation is not a narrow subject-methodological approach alone, but a broader didactic and general pedagogical framework. This is because the concept must define not only teaching techniques, but also aims, content logic, learning organization, independent-study mechanisms, and assessment criteria.

*The andragogical approach.* The first foundational approach is the andragogical approach. Since university students in non-philological programmes are adult or near-adult learners, their education should take into account the key principles of adult learning: the learner's need to know, self-concept, prior experience, readiness to learn, problem orientation, and intrinsic motivation. Recent work applying andragogy in higher-level training contexts confirms the continued relevance of these principles and highlights self-directed learning and the role of experience as especially important.

For the present concept, the andragogical approach is important because soft skills cannot be developed effectively through passive reception of information. They require active, meaningful participation, the linking of learning to real needs, and the opportunity for learners to make decisions about goals, strategies, and self-monitoring. In English teaching, this means that independent study should not be reduced to homework repetition. Instead, it should be designed as a guided but increasingly self-directed process in which students choose resources, plan tasks, regulate their time, reflect on progress, and apply language to realistic academic or professional situations.

*The competency-based approach.* The second foundational approach is the competency-based approach. This approach shifts educational attention from the amount of content covered to the learner's demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in real or simulated situations. Contemporary competency-based education is explicitly outcome-focused and aims to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical abilities such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Research in this area also associates lifelong learning with transferable competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, reasoning, and self-direction.

In the context of English teaching, the competency-based approach is highly productive because it prevents language learning from being treated as an end in itself. Instead, English becomes a medium through which students perform meaningful actions: explaining, negotiating, presenting, analyzing, persuading, and collaborating. As a result, linguistic competence and soft skills become interdependent outcomes. This approach also makes assessment more transparent because expected soft skills can be translated into observable indicators, such as the ability to justify a viewpoint, distribute roles in group work, respond to questions, manage conflict, or reflect on one's own performance.

*The activity-based approach.* The third foundational approach is the activity-based approach. In its broad pedagogical meaning, this approach assumes that knowledge is not simply transmitted in ready-made form but is constructed through purposeful activity. In language education, this logic is strongly compatible with action-oriented and task-based views, according to which learners are social agents engaged in meaningful action, interaction, and mediation. The CEFR explicitly places collaboration and mediation at the centre of communicative activity, while recent research in higher education shows that task-based and project-based language learning can support communication, collaboration, and problem-solving when tasks are authentic and learner-centred.

Within the proposed concept, the activity-based approach provides the direct mechanism for soft-skills formation. When students plan a presentation, solve a case, negotiate a decision, prepare a group report, or complete a project in English, they are not only using language but also exercising responsibility, initiative, critical thinking, teamwork, and self-regulation. Thus, activity is the pedagogical space in which soft skills become visible, practiced, and assessable.

*Derived principles of the concept.* The integration of the three approaches makes it possible to formulate a system of guiding principles for the concept.

The first principle is **outcome orientation**. Soft skills should not remain general declarations; they need to be formulated as expected competencies with observable indicators. This principle follows from competency-based education and helps align aims, tasks, and assessment.

The second principle is **integration of language skills and soft skills**. Speaking, writing, listening, and reading activities should be designed in such a way that they

simultaneously require communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, or self-management. This reflects current curriculum thinking, which views competence as broader than the memorization of content.

The third principle is **professional relevance and contextualization**. Tasks should be connected to the students' future professional field so that soft skills emerge in meaningful contexts rather than in artificial classroom routines. For students of economics, management, engineering, medicine, or other non-language disciplines, this means using case studies, reports, negotiations, presentations, data commentary, or workplace-style communication. ESP research and project-based higher-education studies support this orientation toward authentic, discipline-related communication.

The fourth principle is **problem- and task-centredness**. Learning should be organized around tasks, problems, and products rather than around isolated explanation of language items. This principle is especially important for soft skills because communication, decision-making, and teamwork are activated most strongly when learners have to solve something together.

The fifth principle is **self-directed learning**. Independent study should be a structured cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring, and reflection. This principle follows from andragogy and helps students develop autonomy, responsibility, and time management.

The sixth principle is **collaboration and shared responsibility**. Since many soft skills are social by nature, group activity must be treated not as an optional classroom variation but as a central organizational form. The CEFR's emphasis on interaction and mediation, together with project-based and task-based language-learning research, provides a strong foundation for this principle.

The seventh principle is **reflection and metacognitive development**. Learners should regularly analyze how they worked, what they achieved, what difficulties they encountered, and how they can improve. Quality-curriculum literature highlights metacognitive reflection, active participation, and learner responsibility as central to meaningful learning.

The eighth principle is **scaffolding and gradual complication**. Soft skills do not emerge instantly; they require staged support. Learners first need models, prompts, phrase banks, role cards, checklists, and feedback, after which the level of independence can gradually increase. Curriculum research likewise stresses that students should be guided progressively into active learning roles rather than expected to assume them immediately.

**Discussion.** The main theoretical implication of this study is that a concept for enhancing soft skills through English teaching should be built on a hierarchy of levels. At the upper, methodological level stand the andragogical, competency-based, and activity-based approaches. At the operational level stand communicative, task-based, project-based, problem-based, integrative, and intercultural methods and techniques. This

distinction is crucial. Without it, educational design tends to collapse into a collection of isolated activities; with it, methods become logically connected to broader aims, principles, and assessment criteria.

This framework is especially suitable for non-philological programmes because English in such contexts functions as an instrument of academic, professional, and social action rather than as a purely philological object of study. The concept therefore makes it possible to move from “teaching English as a subject” to “using English as a medium for competence development.” In this model, independent learning occupies a central place: it becomes the space where students plan, search, select, analyze, create, collaborate, and reflect, thus turning soft skills from abstract expectations into habitual practices. The learner-centred and competence-oriented understanding of curriculum strongly supports such a shift.

Another important implication concerns assessment. If soft skills are part of the intended results, they should also be part of assessment design. This means that rubrics, portfolios, peer feedback, self-assessment, and performance tasks should be used alongside language-focused assessment. Recent soft-skills research in higher education and curriculum-level reviews both point to the importance of embedding such skills into pedagogy and assessment, not merely naming them in policy language.

**Conclusion.** The article has shown that the development of a concept for enhancing soft skills in teaching English in non-philological programmes requires a clear and coherent theoretical foundation. A concept should not be limited to a list of desirable skills or teaching techniques. It must be grounded in approaches that determine its logic, structure, and evaluative potential. In the present study, that role is performed by the andragogical, competency-based, and activity-based approaches.

On the basis of these approaches, a set of pedagogical principles was formulated: outcome orientation, integration of language and soft skills, professional relevance, problem-centredness, self-directed learning, collaboration, reflection, and scaffolding. Together, these principles provide a consistent framework for designing English teaching that develops not only linguistic competence but also transferable capacities needed in contemporary study and employment contexts. Given the growing labour-market importance of communication, adaptability, leadership, collaboration, and analytical thinking, such a framework is both pedagogically justified and socially necessary.

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