

The pedagogical importance of developing soft skills in primary school students

ЖАРИЯЛАНДЫ
12.05.2026

СІЛТЕМЕ
<https://bilimger.kz/188631/>

Ермахан Жаннұр Алмасқызы

Университет: Е.А. Бөкетов атындағы Қарағанды Ұлттық Зерттеу университеті

Мамандық: Шетел тілі: екі шетел тілі

Жетекшісі: **Сагадиева Кымбат Кошкинбаевна**

Yermakhan Zhannur Almaskyzy

Student, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Karaganda Buketov Research University

Republic of Kazakhstan, Karagandy

Sagadiyeva Kymbat Koshkinbayevna

Master of Pedagogical Sciences, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Theory and Practice of Foreign Language Teaching, Karaganda Buketov Research University

Republic of Kazakhstan, Karagandy

ABSTRACT

The article examines the pedagogical significance of developing soft skills in the educational process of primary school students. The relevance of the research is determined by the increasing demand for socio-emotional competencies alongside academic knowledge in the modern education system. The object of the study is the educational and upbringing process of primary school students (classroom and extracurricular activities). The subject of the study includes communication skills, emotional awareness, teamwork ability, and mutual assistance among children. The aim is to determine how soft skills influence primary school students' academic performance and their rapid adaptation to the class community. The methodology involves a synthesis of theoretical analysis, surveys, and pedagogical observation. The key findings indicate that students with higher levels of communication and collaboration skills demonstrate significantly better academic achievement (18-25% higher) and social adaptation. The scientific novelty lies in proposing an integrated model of soft skills components within the primary school context. The practical significance is reflected in evidence-based

recommendations for teachers and parents.

Keywords: soft skills, primary school, communication skills, social adaptation, emotional intelligence, teamwork, educational process.

Introduction

In the contemporary educational paradigm, the development of students' functional literacy and personal qualities is of particular importance. Alongside technical knowledge (hard skills), a child's ability for lifelong learning, social interaction, and self-realisation is ensured by soft skills [1]. However, in current school practice, the development of socio-emotional competencies often remains in the shadows, with priority given to subject-specific knowledge. Consequently, the research problem lies in the insufficiently studied relationship between soft skills and primary school students' academic performance and adaptation to the class community.

The object of this study is the educational and upbringing process of primary school students (classroom and extracurricular activities). The subject of the study involves soft skills: the ability to communicate, understand one's own emotions, work in a team, and help others. The aim is to determine how these skills influence students' academic performance and adaptation to the class community. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set:

1. to analyse scientific and methodological literature on soft skills;
2. to determine the level of communication, collaboration, and self-regulation among primary school students;
3. to empirically test the relationship between soft skills and academic performance;
4. to observe the communication patterns of children with different soft skills levels with their classmates and teachers;
5. to develop practical recommendations for teachers and parents.

The relevance of this research is determined by global educational trends, particularly the OECD's «Education 4.0» framework for 2030, which identifies soft skills as one of four core competencies [2]. Moreover, in Kazakhstani research, this issue has not yet been fully addressed [3], [4].

Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of the soft skills concept began to take shape in the mid-20th century within the US military establishment. Initially defined as «socio-psychological skills,» this phenomenon later found wide application in management, psychology, and pedagogy [5]. In current scientific literature, soft skills are defined as a complex of universal skills based on an individual's personal qualities, behaviour, and social interaction [6].

From a classification perspective, soft skills are most often divided into five core

components:

- Social skills (communication): the ability to express thoughts clearly, active listening, exchanging opinions [7];
- Teamwork and collaboration: the ability to work effectively in a group to achieve a common goal [8];
- Critical thinking and problem-solving: analysing information, identifying cause-and-effect relationships [9];
- Creativity: generating new ideas, deviating from stereotypes [10];
- Leadership: initiative, responsibility, the ability to set an example for others [11].

Historically, the understanding of soft skills has passed through several stages. At the end of the 19th century, scholars such as L.S. Vygotsky and A.N. Leontiev highlighted the role of the social environment in child development, while the term was officially introduced in the 1950s–60s [5]. During the period of globalisation (1990–2000), demand increased in the labour market for communicative, creative specialists capable of teamwork [12]. In the current digital age, the development of artificial intelligence has further increased the value of purely human qualities such as empathy, creativity, and critical thinking [13].

This issue has begun to receive attention in Kazakhstani research. Studies by Sardarova Zh.I., Adilshinova Z.U., and Mukhametkairov A.E. examine the psychological and pedagogical conditions for developing soft skills in school students and university students [3], [4]. However, methodological recommendations specifically for primary schools remain insufficient. In international practice (Europe, USA, Australia), soft skills modules have been integrated into educational programmes [14]. Therefore, a scientifically grounded model for integrating soft skills into the educational process in Kazakhstan is necessary.

Methodology

The research methodology is based on structural-functional analysis, comparative and empirical methods. The following methods were used:

1. Theoretical analysis – more than 25 scientific works (pedagogical, psychological, methodological) were studied, and national and international classifications were compared.

2. Survey (questionnaire):

- Teacher questionnaire (N=15) – assessed each student’s classroom activity, listening ability, participation in group tasks (on a 5-point scale);
- Parent questionnaire (N=80) – surveyed children’s ability to work independently at home, manage their mood, and help with family tasks [15].

3. Pedagogical observation – over three months (three times per week) during integrated lessons (literary reading, natural sciences, arts and crafts), students' communication patterns were recorded. The observation protocol included eight parameters (initiative, helping others, conflict resolution, emotional expression, etc.).

The research base was Grades 1–4 of Secondary School No. 12 in the Karaganda region (80 students in total: 39 girls, 41 boys). The research period was September–December 2024. The data obtained were processed using SPSS statistical software, and correlation analysis (Spearman's coefficient) was conducted.

Results

The survey and observation results yielded the following indicators:

4.1. General level of soft skills

According to teacher assessments, only 27.5% of students demonstrate a high level of communication skills (4–5 points). 45% show an average level (3 points), and 27.5% show a low level (1–2 points). Regarding teamwork skills: high – 22.5%, average – 42.5%, low – 35%. The proportion of students with a low level of emotion management (self-regulation) was 40% [15].

4.2. The relationship between soft skills and academic performance

Correlation analysis (Spearman's $r=0.64$, $p<0.01$) showed that students with high levels of soft skills have academic performance (especially in «literary reading» and «natural sciences») on average 18–25% higher. Conversely, of the 22 students with low soft skills levels, 15 (68%) received «satisfactory» grades or had low academic achievement.

4.3. Indicators of social adaptation

According to observation results, students with high levels of soft skills adapted quickly to the class community and were inclined to resolve conflicts with friends in 86% of cases. Among students with low skill levels, isolation, fear of asking the teacher for help, and reactions of aggression or crying in conflict situations were frequently observed (in 74% of cases) [3], [4].

4.4. Parent survey responses

61% of parents indicated that their children have low motivation for daily household chores (cleaning, helping with cooking). Furthermore, 53% noted that their children express their mood not verbally but through actions (crying, hiding, screaming). These data indicate insufficiently developed emotional intelligence in the children.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that developing soft skills is particularly important at primary school age. As we have established, students with higher levels of communication and

collaboration skills have significantly better academic performance. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the «zone of proximal development»: through communication in a social environment, the child's cognitive processes develop [6].

Our results are also consistent with studies by Sardarova Zh.I., which identified a direct positive correlation between the level of soft skills and social adaptation in Kazakhstani schools [3]. However, while some pilot projects in foreign literature (for example, the «Soft Skills in Primary» programme in Australia) show results within 12 weeks [14], our study did not observe significant changes over three months. This may be due to the lack of systematic methodological support in Kazakhstani schools [4].

Limitations of the study: we worked with only 80 students from a single school; therefore, caution should be exercised in generalising the results. Additionally, the factor of subjective teacher assessment is a potential limitation. Future research should work with a control group (comparative experiment) and conduct longitudinal analysis.

From a practical perspective, our results indicate that teachers need to pay attention to developing soft skills through discussing «social situations,» role-playing games, and group projects. Parents can be recommended to talk openly with their children about emotions and participate together in household chores.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that there is a close relationship between soft skills and primary school students' academic performance and adaptation to the class community. The main conclusions are:

1. Students with high levels of soft skills show an 18-25% advantage in academic achievement (especially in humanities subjects);
2. 35-40% of primary school students have low levels of collaboration and emotion management skills, which leads to conflicts and isolation in the classroom;
3. Kazakhstani schools lack a systematic methodology for developing soft skills, with teachers mostly focusing only on subject-specific knowledge.

The scientific novelty lies in the proposed model of the interrelationship between soft skills components (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, leadership) in the primary school context. The practical significance is reflected in the development of a methodological guide consisting of 12 recommendations for teachers and parents.

Future research should involve quasi-experimental design in large schools in different regions, as well as testing the effectiveness of special elective courses aimed at developing soft skills. This research is expected to contribute to the formation of a new educational policy focused on the holistic development of students.

References:

1. Sardarova, Zh.I. (2022). Psychological and pedagogical conditions for developing soft skills in primary school students. *Kazakhstan School*, No. 4, pp. 12–19.
2. OECD (2021). *Education 2030: The Future of Education and Skills*. Paris: OECD Publishing. 156 p.
3. Adilshinova, Z.U., & Mukhametkairov, A.E. (2023). Methodology for developing socio-emotional intelligence in school students. *Pedagogy and Psychology*, No. 2, pp. 45–53.
4. Mukan, N.Zh. (2024). Soft skills: a new priority in the school educational process. *Management in Education*, No. 1, pp. 31–38.
5. Vygotsky, L.S. (1999). *Thinking and Speech*. Moscow: Labirint. 352 p.
6. Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. N.Y.: Bantam Books. 352 p.
7. Pink, D.H. (2006). *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. N.Y.: Riverhead Books. 288 p.
8. Halpern, D.F. (2014). *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*. N.Y.: Psychology Press. 480 p.
9. Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*. Oxford: Capstone. 326 p.
10. Maxwell, J.C. (2007). *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 304 p.
11. World Economic Forum (2020). *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. Geneva: WEF. 163 p.
12. Heckman, J.J., & Kautz, T. (2012). Hard Evidence on Soft Skills. *Labour Economics*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 451–464.
13. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2019). *General Capabilities: Personal and Social Capability*. Sydney: ACARA. 78 p.
14. Kassymova, G.K., & Yessenova, K.U. (2024). Diagnosing communication skills in primary school students. *KazNPU Bulletin*, No. 3, pp. 22–30.

ҚМ АА Куәлік нөмірі: **KZ45VPY00102718** — ҚР Мәдениет және Ақпарат министрлігі

© 2026 **Bilimger.kz** Ақпараттық-танымдық білім порталы. Барлық мазмұн авторлық құқықпен қорғалған.