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## **DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN CHILDREN OF THE OLDER GROUP IN JOINT COGNITIVE ACTIVITY**

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**Abstract.** The article examines the development of soft skills in older preschool children through joint cognitive activities. In the theoretical study the notions and examples of soft skills and joint cognitive ability are analyzed. Moreover, the importance of communicative, teamwork and leadership skills, as well as emotional intelligence, creative and critical thinking in early childhood education is highlighted. Modern pedagogical approaches that emphasize collaborative learning, role-playing games, and problem-solving tasks are considered as key methods for enhancing children's social and cognitive abilities, along with other soft skills.

As a formative experiment, a training program for developing mentioned soft skills in children of the older group was designed and implemented. The results of observation indicate that joint cognitive activity fosters children's ability to communicate effectively, work in teams, and adapt to new situations. The calculated Fisher's criterion showed that the training program which includes diverse cognitive activities and games enhances preschoolers' soft skills. The overall study contributes to the growing number of researches on early childhood education by emphasizing the necessity of incorporating soft skills training into standard curricula.

The results of the study showed that the development of soft skills gives stable results while continuing at the primary level, and is not limited to preschool education. It is noted in world scientific works that these skills are the main competence inherent in a person of the 21st century. Therefore, the formation of a scientifically based system for the development of children's cooperative tendencies and leadership qualities from preschool age is the key to the upbringing of a future successful personality.

**Keywords:** soft skills, joint cognitive activity, preschool education, children of the older group, development of soft skills, training program, communication, collaboration

### **Introduction**

In the modern world, soft skills play a crucial role in an individual's personal and professional success. While traditional education systems focus primarily on hard skills, recent researches underscore the necessity of developing soft skills from an early age [1]. These skills, including communication, teamwork,

leadership, creativity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence, help children adapt to social environments, resolve conflicts, analyze perceived information, and collaborate effectively with peers.

The importance of soft skills development in preschool education has been recognized in various studies [2; 3]. Researchers suggest that joint cognitive activities create an ideal environment for fostering these skills in developing personalities. Collaborative problem-solving, discussions, role-playing, and project-based learning allow children to develop communication and teamwork abilities naturally, along with EI and analytical thinking.

In Kazakhstan, in particular, the development of soft skills in preschool children is provided for by a number of regulatory documents, the main of which is the State Mandatory Standard of Preschool Education and Training. This standard, approved by the Order No. 348 of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2022, is aimed at developing communication skills, critical thinking, creativity and teamwork skills in children [4].

As such, this study aims to analyze the role and effectiveness of joint cognitive activities in the development of soft skills in older preschool children.

The *objectives of the study* are as follows:

- 1) to break down the notion, significance and structure of soft skills;
- 2) to examine effective methods and activities for fostering different soft skills in preschoolers.
- 3) to identify the role of organizing joint cognitive activity when developing soft skills in preschool children;
- 4) to investigate the effectiveness of the training program designed for children of the older group.

Among foreign researchers who studied development of soft skills in children of the older group we should mention Binky Laureta. In her article she examines how soft skills align with New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum. Reflecting on the teaching of boundaries, the article highlights the importance of early development of communication, emotional, and interpersonal skills. Laureta argues that these skills, often tied to adult life, are fundamental to young children's learning and personality, advocating for their intentional support in preschool education [5].

In another article, B. Laureta highlights the role of play in nurturing soft skills—also known as learning dispositions—in early childhood education. Grounded in the same empirical basis, the study focuses on developing self-control and creativity through meaningful, everyday play experiences. The author emphasizes that soft skills such as EI, self-regulation, and creativity are best learned through intentional teaching within play-based contexts. Using concrete examples, she outlines how educators can support children's soft skills development through guided reflection, emotional validation, and scaffolded independence [6].

From a different perspective of the issue, Bonnie Laxton-Blinkhorn explores the critical role of soft skills in enhancing early childhood educators' effectiveness. In her article, she differentiates between hard and soft skills, emphasizing the

significance of personal traits like EI, communication, patience, and cultural competence for supporting children, collaborating with families, and fostering professional growth. These interpersonal skills not only shape positive learning environments but also contribute to career success in the early education sector. The article underscores the growing value and need for soft skills development in educational activity [7].

The research of Ukrainian scientists leaded by Inna Karuk is dedicated to the development of cooperation skills — key soft skills — in senior preschoolers through group experimentation. Observations, surveys, and educator involvement reveal how collaborative experiments foster school readiness and interpersonal development. The study emphasizes the educator's role at all stages of the experimental procedure and highlights the need for dedicated experimentation centers in preschools to support teamwork and inquiry-based learning [8].

As for Russian scholars who investigated the problem we are interested in, I.G. Kalinina and her colleagues discussed the impact of societal development on changes in the education system, particularly in preschool education, focusing on the development of communicative skills in children through various activities. They highlighted the importance of universal educational skills, such as the ability to independently gather information and communicate with both peers and adults. Their study identifies the types of activities that promote a child's overall development and systematizes the communicative skills of preschoolers. The authors inferred that cognitive activities significantly contribute to the enhancement of communication skills in preschool children [9].

The article of T.D. Savenkova and her coauthors presents an empirical study evaluating the effectiveness of the program “Everyone Can Become a Leader!” aimed at developing leadership qualities in 6–7-year-old children through joint activities. The program includes three blocks: cognitive (understanding leadership), communicative (developing communication and emotional skills), and behavioral (organizing and managing group tasks). A pedagogical experiment showed significant improvement in leadership traits in the experimental group compared to the control group, confirming the program's positive impact and applicability in preschool education [10].

L.V. Mammedova and L.V. Kudrenko in their scientific work focused on the development of communication skills in senior preschoolers, emphasizing the importance of social and communicative development in preschool education. According to the federal educational program, it aims to teach children the accepted norms and values of society, and to enhance communication with both adults and peers. The article presents the findings of a primary research conducted at one kindergarten in Neryungri city, involving 16 preschool children aged 5-6 years. The research used several diagnostic methods to assess the participants' communication abilities, including evaluations of their leading form of communication, social and communicative competence, and perceptual communication skills [11].

## **Materials and methods**

The research is based on a mixed approach, combining observational studies and experimental interventions in preschool settings. The empirical study involved 78 children aged 5-6 years from four kindergartens of Almaty.

The following methods were employed by us to accomplish the tasks of the study:

- *Theoretical analysis of literature*: about soft skills development in joint cognitive activity of preschool children;
- *Analysis and generalization* of definitions of soft skills and joint cognitive activity;
- *Experimental activities*: Implementing structured cognitive tasks from the designed psycho-pedagogical program that require the use of diverse soft skills.
- *Observation*: Tracking children's interactions during joint cognitive activities during the formative experiment.
- *Fisher's criterion*: Analyzing the significance of changes in the level of soft skills formation in the study participants after the experimental interventions.

## **Results and discussion**

*Theoretical study.* First of all, let us define the term "soft skills". They are a combination of personal traits, social skills, communication abilities, emotional intelligence, and cognitive features that enable a person to interact effectively and harmoniously with others. In other words, soft skills are non-technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal attributes that influence how an individual interacts with people and approaches tasks [12].

Soft skills complement hard skills, which are abilities related to certain occupations and activities, and play a crucial role in achieving personal and social success, even from early childhood. We may point out the following profits of soft skills development in preschool children that show their significance:

- *Foundation for Future Success*. Soft skills like communication, creativity, and cooperation lay the groundwork for academic achievement and social integration.
- *Supports Emotional Intelligence*. Developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy helps children manage emotions and understand others.
- *Enhances Social Interaction*. Skills such as sharing, listening, and teamwork foster positive relationships with peers and adults.
- *Boosts Communication Skills*. Early development of verbal and non-verbal communication supports clearer expression of needs and ideas.
- *Encourages Problem-Solving and Adaptability*. Children learn to cope with challenges, think critically, and adapt to changes, which is crucial for solving tasks and overcoming obstacles in learning.
- *Promotes Independence and Responsibility*. Soft skills help children take initiative, make simple decisions, and become more self-reliant.
- *Improves Classroom Behavior*. Children with well-developed soft skills are more likely to follow rules, focus on tasks, and respect authority.

- *Prepares for School Readiness.* Soft skills are critical for successful transition to formal schooling, including the ability to work in groups and follow instructions.

As such key soft skills that should be developed in preschool children include:

- *Communication:* formulating thoughts, expressing needs, and listening to others, using verbal and non-verbal means of communication;

- *Collaboration/Teamwork:* playing and working with peers cooperatively to achieve a common goal, determining roles and tasks of each member;

- *Self-regulation:* managing emotions, attention and behavior, following rules of the community (in our case, kindergarten) and instructions of the educator;

- *Empathy:* understanding feelings of other people, demonstrating compassion and respect of their situation and emotional state;

- *Critical thinking:* thinking clearly, noticing details, making connections, and reasoning about what they see, hear, or experience;

- *Problem-solving:* identifying problems and finding solutions during play, study, or conflict, as well as reflecting on the result;

- *Adaptability:* adjusting to new routines, circumstances and environments like waking up early and doing homework, studying in the kindergarten;

- *Creativity:* using imagination and original thinking when solving diverse tasks and for self-expression, exploring new ideas and ways of doing something.

These 8 soft skills play a critical role in personal achievements, social interactions, and academic success. They are illustrated in Figure 1.

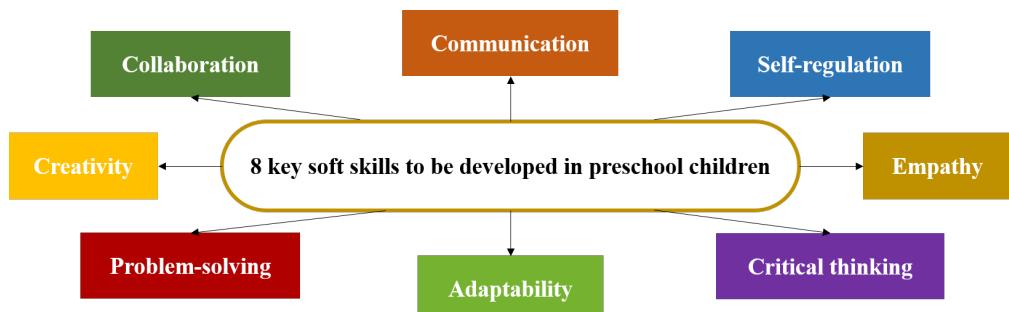


Figure 1 - 8 key soft skills to be developed in preschool children

Now let us proceed to the development of soft skills in the educational process, during joint cognitive activity in particular. Basically, joint cognitive activity refers to collaborative learning and thinking processes where two or more individuals (e.g., child-child, children-adult) engage in a shared task or problem-solving situation [13]. It's based on interaction, mutual understanding, and shared goals.

Key features of joint cognitive activity involve:

- Communication and dialogue;
- Shared attention and understanding;

- Mutual regulation of actions;
- Co-construction of knowledge [13].

They are demonstrated in Figure 2 as a scheme.

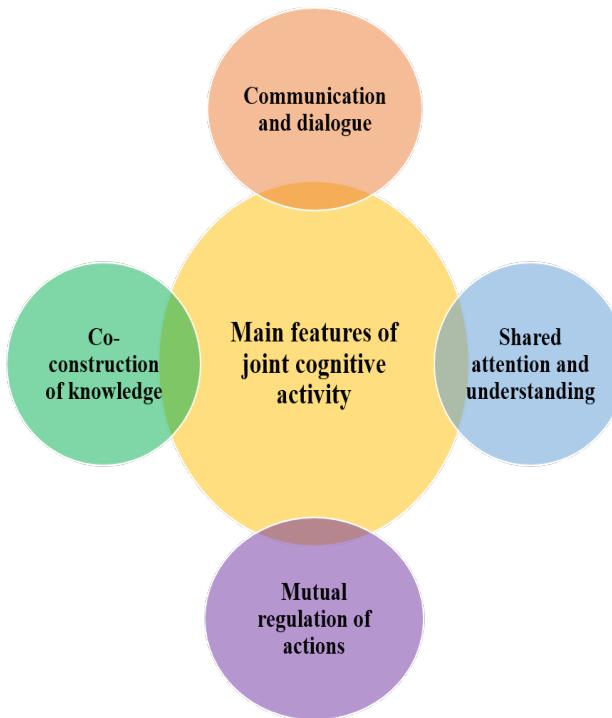


Figure 2 - Main features of joint cognitive activity

In preschool settings, this is represented by:

- ❖ *Group games*: children unite in teams to win a game following definite rules and practicing academic and physical skills;
- ❖ *Role-plays*: activities, encouraging leadership and teamwork, where children assume different roles, making up or replaying a scenario;
- ❖ *Problem-solving tasks*: children work together to complete puzzles, words, matching tasks and logical challenges;
- ❖ *Storytelling*: creating or continuing a story adding sentences one-by-one remembering previous context;
- ❖ *Discussion sessions*: guided conversations in which children learn to express opinions and listen to groupmates;
- ❖ *Building activities*: playing a constructor, mosaic, cubes or puzzles with peers to construct one thing as a mini-project.

As such, there are various methods and forms of organizing joint cognitive activity in the educational settings of a kindergarten. It should be noted that game-based-learning, visualization and scaffolding are important for effective development of personal traits and soft skills of preschool children.

With modern education placing high demands on the professional training of preschool education and upbringing, a special place is occupied by the problem of the development of flexible skills Soft skills in preschool children. With preschoolers, parents, joint activity becomes the basis for the development of flexible skills [14].

*Empirical study.* The mentioned kinds of joint cognitive activity were included in our training program for developing soft skills in preschool children complexly and contextually.

The findings of the empirical study demonstrate that joint cognitive activities significantly contribute to the development of soft skills in children of the older group:

1. *Communication skills.* Children participating in group discussions and storytelling exercises showed improved verbal expression, active listening, and ability to articulate thoughts clearly. Educators reported a noticeable increase in children's confidence in communicating with peers and adults.

2. *Teamwork and Collaboration.* Group problem-solving tasks and role-playing games fostered cooperation and shared responsibility. Children learned to negotiate roles, contribute ideas, and support each other in completing tasks.

3. *Leadership and Social skills.* Role-playing provided opportunities for children to take on leadership roles, make decisions, and guide their peers. Over time, children who were initially hesitant to lead became more proactive and assertive.

4. *Creativity and Critical thinking.* Project-based learning encouraged children to think outside the box, explore multiple solutions to problems, and express themselves through creative means such as drawing, storytelling, and model-building. They actively used own imagination among other cognitive skills.

5. *Emotional intelligence.* Through interactive activities, children developed empathy, learned to recognize emotions in themselves and others, and improved their conflict-resolution skills. In general, friendly and constructive relationships were encouraged in the collective.

6. *Self-regulation and adaptability:* Educators observed a decline in behavioral issues as children became more adept at managing emotions and impulses. Study participants also improved their learning results since they developed better concentration of attention and healthy sleep mode.

These results align with previous research emphasizing the role of social interactions in early childhood development. The study confirms that structured joint cognitive activities provide a foundation for the natural acquisition of soft skills in preschool children.

In addition, the development of soft skills – flexible skills in children of the older preschool group contributes to managing children's emotions, improving the culture of communication, and faster adaptation to a new situation [15].

Now let us analyze the effectiveness of the realized training program using a method of statistical processing of data known as Fisher's criterion. In other words, it is Criterion  $\varphi^*$  or the Fisher angular transformation.

Initially, the study participants from 4 kindergartens (78 preschool children at the age of 5-6) were divided into two groups: control (38) and experimental (40). The developmental program was implemented in the second group.

For comparative analysis, we have set two hypotheses:  $H_0$  and  $H_1$ :

▪  $H_0$  (*Null Hypothesis*): There is no statistically significant difference in the level of soft skills development between preschool children who participated in the original training program (experimental group) and those who did not (control group). The observed differences are due to random variation.

▪  $H_1$  (*Alternative Hypothesis*): There is a statistically significant improvement in the level of soft skills development among preschool children who participated in the original training program (experimental group) compared to those in the control group. The observed differences are due to the effect of the implemented program.

The analysis of significance of changes in parameters according to Fisher's criterion is provided in Table 1 and Figure 3.

Table 1 – Results of calculation of Fisher's criterion among 2 groups

Groups	«There is an effect»: task solved	«There is no effect»: task not solved	Totals
Control	12 (31.6%)	26 (68.4%)	38 (100%)
Experimental	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)	40 (100%)

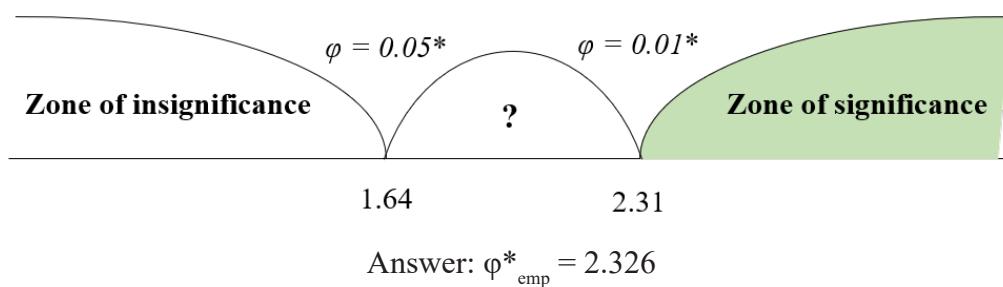


Figure 3 - Axis of Significance according to the Fisher's criterion calculation

As we can see on the graph:

- Zone of insignificance is on the left (values  $< 1.64$ ),
- Zone of uncertainty is between 1.64 and 2.31,
- Zone of significance is on the right (values  $> 2.31$ ).

The obtained empirical value  $\varphi^*$  lies in the zone of significance.  $H_0$  is rejected.

Thus, the designed psycho-pedagogical program consisting of various group games and activities for 5-6 years old children can be considered effective. It contributes to the development of soft skills, including communication and collaboration skills, EI, creative and critical thinking, as well as self-regulation and adaptability.

### Conclusion

To sum up, the study highlights the effectiveness of joint cognitive activities in fostering soft skills in older preschool children. Through communication, teamwork, leadership, creativity, and emotional intelligence training, children develop essential life skills that prepare them for future academic and social challenges.

Educators play a crucial role in facilitating these skills by incorporating collaborative learning strategies into daily activities. The research suggests that preschools should integrate structured cognitive activities that encourage teamwork, problem-solving, and role-playing to enhance children's social and cognitive development.

Future research should explore long-term effects of early soft skills training and investigate how these skills influence later academic performance and career success. Additionally, developing standardized assessment tools for measuring soft skills in preschool children could further support educational strategies aimed at holistic development.

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## БІРЛЕСКЕН ТАНЫМДЫҚ ІС-ӘРЕКЕТТЕ ЕРЕСЕК ТОП БАЛАЛАРЫНЫң ИКЕМДІ Дағдыларын (SOFT SKILLS) ДАМЫТУ

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**Аннотация.** Мақалада ересек жастағы мектепке дейінгі балалардың soft skills – икемді дағдыларын бірлескен танымдық әрекет арқылы дамыту мәселеі қарастырылады. Теориялық зерттеуде икемді дағдылар мен бірлескентанымдық іс-әрекеттүшімдары мен мысалдары талданған. Сонымен қатар, мектепке дейінгі білім беруде коммуникативтік, топпен жұмыс істеу және көшбасшылық дағдыларының, эмоционалдық интеллекттің, креативті және сынни ойлаудың маңыздылығы көрсетіледі. Балалардың әлеуметтік және танымдық қабілеттерін дамыту үшін бірлескен оқыту, рөлдік ойындар мен проблемалық тапсырмаларға негізделген заманауи педагогикалық тәсілдер басты әдістер ретінде қарастырылған.

Формативті эксперимент аясында ересек топ балаларына арналған икемді дағдыларды дамыту бойынша оқыту бағдарламасы жасалып, жүзеге асырылды. Бақылау нәтижелері балалардың тиімді қарым-қатынас жасау, топта жұмыс істеу және жаңа жағдайларға бейімделу қабілеттерінің артуына бірлескен танымдық әрекеттің он әсер еткенін көрсетті. Фиsher критерийі арқылы алынған нәтижелер бағдарламаның тиімділігін дәлелдеді: түрлі танымдық іс-әрекеттер мен ойындар балабақша жасындағы балалардың икемді дағдыларын жетілдіруге ықпал етеді. Бұл зерттеу мектепке дейінгі білім беру саласындағы ғылыми ізденістерді көңейтуге үлес қосады және оқу бағдарламаларына икемді дағдыларды дамытатын тренингтерді енгізуіндің қажеттілігін көрсетеді

Зерттеу нәтижелері soft skills дағдыларын дамыту тек мектепке дейінгі біліммен шектелмей, бастауыш буынмен жалғасқанда тұрақты нәтиже беретінін көрсетті. Әлемдік ғылыми еңбектерде аталған дағдылардың XXI ғасыр адамына тән басты құзыреттілік екені атап өтіледі. Соңықтан мектепке дейінгі кезеңнен бастап балалардың ынтымақтастыққа бейімділігі мен көшбасшылық қасиеттерін дамытудың ғылыми негізделген жүйесін қалыптастыру – болашақ табысты тұлға тәрбиелеудің кепілі болып табылады.

**Тірек сөздер:** икемді дағдылар, бірлескен танымдық іс-әрекет, мектепке дейінгі білім беру, ересек топ балалары, икемді дағдыларды дамыту, тренингтік бағдарлама, қарым-қатынас, ынтымақтастық

## РАЗВИТИЕ ГИБКИХ НАВЫКОВ (SOFT SKILLS) У ДЕТЕЙ СТАРШЕЙ ГРУППЫ В СОВМЕСТНОЙ ПОЗНАВАТЕЛЬНОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается развитие гибких навыков (soft skills) у детей старшего дошкольного возраста через совместную познавательную деятельность. В теоретической части проанализированы понятия и примеры гибких навыков и совместной познавательной активности. Особое внимание уделяется значению коммуникативных, командных и лидерских навыков, а также эмоционального интеллекта, креативного и критического мышления в системе дошкольного образования. В качестве ключевых методов развития социальных и познавательных способностей детей обозначены современные педагогические подходы, акцентирующие внимание на совместном обучении, ролевых играх и решении проблемных задач.

В рамках формирующего эксперимента была разработана и реализована программа тренинга, направленная на развитие указанных гибких навыков у детей старшой группы. Результаты наблюдения показали, что совместная познавательная деятельность способствует формированию у детей умений эффективно общаться, работать в команде и адаптироваться к новым ситуациям. Расчёты по критерию Фишера подтвердили эффективность программы: участие в разнообразных познавательных активностях и играх способствует развитию гибких навыков у дошкольников. Полученные данные вносят вклад в расширяющиеся исследования в области дошкольного образования, подчёркивая необходимость включения тренингов по гибким навыкам в стандартные образовательные программы.

Результаты исследования показали, что развитие навыков soft skills дает стабильные результаты при продолжении начального звена, а не ограничивается дошкольным образованием. В мировых научных трудах отмечается, что перечисленные навыки являются главной компетенцией, присущей человеку XXI века. Поэтому формирование научно обоснованной системы развития у детей склонности к сотрудничеству и лидерских качеств с дошкольного возраста – залог воспитания будущей успешной личности.

**Ключевые слова:** гибкие навыки, совместная познавательная деятельность, дошкольное образование, дети старшой группы, развитие гибких навыков, тренинговая программа, общение, сотрудничество

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