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Development of Skills to Listen to the Interlocutor in the Process of Future Social Workers' Communication and Speech Training

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Abstract. The relevance of the research is determined by the priority competence area of training qualified specialists, in particular future social workers, which provides for the development and improvement of not only speech but also auditory skills. The purpose of the study is a theoretical analysis and practical substantiation of the specific features of the development of future social specialists' skills to listen to the interlocutor in the process of communication and speech training in higher educational institutions. The study consisted of two stages, namely theoretical and empirical, which led to the use of general scientific research methods and special scientific research methods, including psychological methods for assessing listening skills. The paper substantiates the specific features of the development of students' and future social workers' skills of active listening to the interlocutor in the process of communication and speech training in higher educational institutions. A theoretical analysis of the types of listening as a component of communicative competence is carried out. The essence of the concept of "active listening" in the professional activity of a social worker is clarified. It was established that the ability to actively listen should be formed and developed in the learning process to carry out effective professional activities. Examples of exercises from the training "The art of listening" are given; a final assessment of the completeness of listening skills in students and future social workers is carried out. It is determined that before the training, students of the specialisation "social work" had a low level of listening skills but after lexical and practical classes, the majority of students rated their level of auditory skills with the highest scores. The practical value of the paper is conditioned by the results of empirical research, which indicate the need for further implementation of a practical complex for the development of auditory skills of future social workers

Keywords: listening, types of listening, listening skills, communication competence, future specialists

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Формування умінь слухати співрозмовника у процесі комунікативно-мовленнєвої підготовки майбутніх соціальних працівників

Анотація. Актуальність наукового дослідження визначається пріоритетним компетентнісним напрямом підготовки кваліфікованих фахівців, зокрема майбутніх соціальних працівників, що передбачає розвиток і вдосконалення не лише мовленнєвих, а й слухових навичок. Метою роботи є теоретичний аналіз і практичне обґрунтування особливостей формування в майбутніх соціальних фахівців навичок слухати співрозмовника в процесі комунікативно-мовленнєвої підготовки у вищих навчальних закладах. Дослідження складалось з двох етапів, а саме теоретичного та емпіричного, які обумовили використання загальнонаукових методів дослідження та спеціально-наукових методів дослідження, серед яких психологічні методики оцінювання вміння слухати. У статті обґрунтовано особливості формування в студентів, майбутніх соціальних працівників умінь активного слухання співрозмовника в процесі комунікативно-мовленнєвої підготовки у закладах вищої освіти. Здійснено теоретичний аналіз видів слухання як складової комунікативної компетентності. Уточнено сутність поняття «активне слухання» в професійній діяльності соціального працівника. З'ясовано, що вміння активного слухання потрібно формувати і розвивати в процесі навчання з метою здійснення ефективної професійної діяльності. Наведено приклади вправ з тренінгу «Мистецтво слухати»; здійснено підсумкове оцінювання сформованості вміння слухати у студентів, майбутніх соціальних працівників. Визначено, що до проведення тренінгу в студентів спеціальності «Соціальна робота» переважав низький рівень вміння слухати, натомість після лексичних і практичних занять більшість студентів оцінила свій рівень слухових навичок за найвищими балами. Практична цінність наукової роботи полягає в результатах емпіричного дослідження, що свідчать про необхідність подальшого впровадження практичного комплексу розвитку слухових навичок майбутніх соціальних працівників

Ключові слова: слухання, види слухання, навички слухання, комунікативна компетентність, майбутні фахівці

Problem Statement

The effectiveness of communication in the professional activity of a social worker depends on the ability to listen. Listening is not just silence but an activity, in the process of which interaction is established between speakers, mutual understanding arises. The best conversationalist is someone who can listen, not just speak well. On this occasion, the German writer L. Feuchtwanger rightly noted that a person needs only two years to learn to speak, and sixty years to learn to listen [1]. Listening to a social worker means giving the client the opportunity to speak out, talk about their problems, and understand and support them. The art of listening to the other person is one of the most important in communication between a social worker and a client, it requires a set of skills that a person learns throughout life.

The authors see the relevance of the problem in the fact that the incomplete ability to listen in the process of carrying out professional activities of a social worker is the cause of misunderstandings, conflict situations that complicate the process of interpersonal interaction, prevent a positive solution to the problem.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications

Various aspects of the problem of professional communication and interpersonal interaction are highlighted in

the research of S. Rodat [2], I.J. Jonsdottir, K. Kristinsson [3], M. Canpolat, S. Kuzu [4], etc. The scientists T. Fassaert, F. Schellevis [5], S. Mineyama, A. Tsutsumi, S. Takao [6], J. Fischer-Lokou, L. Lamy [7], S. Spataro, J. Bloch [8] focus on listening methods as the basis for effective communication. However, the development of the ability to listen in the process of professional training of future social workers requires additional research.

The Purpose of the Paper

To identify the theoretical aspects of the problem and substantiate the specific features of the development of students' and future social workers' ability to listen to the interlocutor in the process of communication and speech training in higher educational institutions.

Research Results

The study of the development of listening skills of the interlocutor in the process of communication and speech training of future social workers requires a clear understanding of the semantic load of the concept of "listening", in particular its types, in the context of which it is worth noting the variability of classifications according to the opinions of individual scientists. The most detailed substantiation of the types of listening and definition of the terms "listen"

and “hear” was provided by the American psychologist I. Atwater in the book “I am listening to You” [9]. The scientist identified two types of listening: reflexive (active) and non-reflexive (passive). Reflexive listening consists in the ability to remain silent and not interfere with the other person’s speech during their monologue. However, I. Atwater considers such silence active since it requires focusing on the subject of the conversation, showing understanding, approval, and support of the speaker. The ability to “listen”, as opposed to the ability to “hear”, is an active process that requires the development of special skills and abilities that need to be learnt. Reflexive listening requires the ability to assess the situation [9]. However, according to O. Kazartseva,

non-reflexive listening consists in the ability to remain silent during the monologue of the interlocutor with the expression of understanding or misunderstanding through facial expressions and gestures. At the same time, reflexive listening should be used as a control over the accuracy of understanding and perception of the utterance [10, p. 287]. V. Kunitsyna’s term “active listening” refers to “feedback from the speaker, with the purpose of controlling the perception of what was heard, in the process of which, unlike non-reflexive listening, the addressee uses the verbal form to confirm the understanding of what was heard” [11, p. 93]. For their part, the Ukrainian linguist F. Batsevych identifies the following types of listening (Fig. 1) [12]:

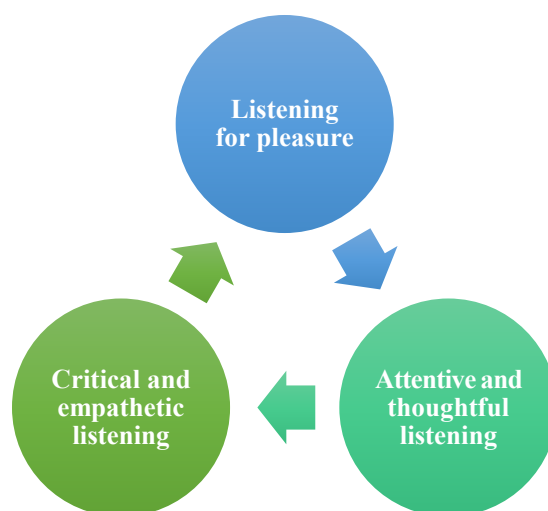


Figure 1. Types of hearings according to F. Batsevych

Important in the context of scientific research is the classification of types of listening according to L. Savenkova, who explains listening as the desire to understand and remember what was heard, which requires formed skills, in particular: perception of information and abstinence from expressing emotions; stimulation to statements, “pushing”; assistance to the development of the speaker’s thought “one step ahead” [13]. The researcher identifies four types of listening: reflexive (or active), non-reflexive (listening without intervention), empathic (ability to empathise), critical (listening without trying to understand) [13, p. 131-132]. Let us look at them from the perspective of a social worker and a client.

Reflexive or active listening is a necessary component of successful communication. Its purpose is to establish feedback with the client to clarify the understanding of information, its individual points. When communicating with the client, the social worker acts as a listener, their task is to perceive the information heard and react in such a way that the response-reaction echoes the information heard from the client, that is, the same thought was heard but already paraphrased in other words. The essence of active listening is that the response-reaction of a social worker should not be evaluative or critical but aimed at helping, sincerity, openness so that the client does not withdraw into themselves but, on

the contrary, shares their emotions, experiences, problems, thoughts, and feelings, gets rid of psychological barriers, and develops communication skills. For this purpose, it is advisable to use such techniques of active listening as clarification (questioning), which consists in clarifying certain information by a social worker, formulating open-type questions, that is, in such a way that they cannot be answered with one word “yes” or “no”; paraphrasing – formulating the interlocutor’s thoughts in their own words to clarify the client’s understanding of information; reflecting feelings – focusing attention not on the content aspect but on emotional reactions; summarising – allows generalising the thoughts and feelings of the interlocutor [14, p. 367]. The ability to actively listen in the professional activity of a social worker is considered as the ability to show interest in the conversation, interpret and analyse information, be aware of the content of what was said, the psychological and emotional state of the interlocutor, use verbal listening techniques (clarification, paraphrasing, summarising) and nonverbal (facial expressions, gestures, posture, look) for a deeper understanding of what was heard. In the professional activity of a social worker, empathic listening is important, which consists in the ability to get into the client’s state of mind. External signs that indicate that a social worker is actively listening to the interlocutor are showing interest in them, their problems,

and a desire to help. It is important for a social worker to demonstrate to the interlocutor by their actions that they are interested in listening to the client; give time to speak out without interrupting the interlocutor, maintain the conversation using nonverbal means of communication (nod of the head, gesture), demonstrate interest in what they are saying, trying to understand the subtext of what they have said; repeat the main idea expressed by them, demonstrating that they were understood correctly. Thus, the technique of active, reflexive listening involves the ability to listen with a look that includes posture, facial expression, smile, sparkle in the eyes, intonation, voice timbre. Using active listening, the social worker can hear not only the words but also understand the emotional state of the client, his mood, experiences, establish relationships, etc.

Non-reflexive (passive) listening consists of minimal intervention by the social worker in the conversation with the client. Here it is important to be able to remain silent, not to interfere with the speech of the interlocutor with one's comments [15, p. 177], especially when the client is very excited, emotional, when it has "boiled over" and they want to express their attitude to the situation that has developed, to speak out. Any remark from a social worker will

be inappropriate, may push the client's mind and further anger, and cause resistance. It is not advisable to use the technique of non-reflexive listening in situations where the interlocutor has little or no desire to speak, they are closed, incommunicative; the client seeks to get support and approval, and not just "consent", which can be perceived by them as contempt and unwillingness to speak, contrary to interests, interferes with self-disclosure. An irritated person cannot be a good listener [13, p. 67-68]. Depending on the situation, during non-reflexive listening, support, approval, and understanding are important through concise answers that help continue the conversation (such as "yes", "I understand You", etc.). It is advisable to use this type of listening when the interlocutor expresses their attitude to the event; seeks to discuss topical issues; feels offended or solves an important problem; when it is difficult for them to state their problems; when it is necessary to restrain emotions in communicating with a person holding a high position. Such listening is impractical in situations where the interlocutor is not interested in the conversation or when their attempts to listen and understand are perceived as consent, complicity. At the same time, the basic rules of reflexive listening by E. Palykhata include (Fig. 2):



Figure 2. The structure of the basic rules of reflexive listening according to E. Palykhata

Source: developed based on [16]

The third type of listening, particularly empathic, involves the social worker's ability to show a level of trust and understanding through feelings rather than words. This type of listening will be effective if the social worker evokes positive emotions in the interlocutor – joy, admiration, support, confidence, and, accordingly, ineffective in the case of causing negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, frustration. A social worker should have empathic qualities, a high level of communication skills, be able to easily establish contact with the client, be positive, cheerful, responsive, and be able to empathise. The most appropriate use of empathic listening in conflict situations, provided that the social worker can show the interlocutor that they understand their feelings, emotional state, as a result of which anger will decrease, the level of emotional tension will decrease, as well as in situations where the client has repeatedly contacted the social worker, trusts them and does not doubt

their professionalism and competence, which indicates a partnership business relationship.

Finally, the use of critical listening techniques is appropriate during business meetings, conferences, discussions, round tables where problems are discussed, ideas related to making certain decisions are put forward. However, the first step is to listen to the message, analyse it, understand the essence of the matter, and only then make critical comments. Thus, the professional activity of a social worker involves communicative and speech interaction, the effectiveness of which depends on the ability to listen to the interlocutor.

After analysing the scientific and methodological literature to identify the ability to listen to the interlocutor with third-year students of specialisation 231 "Social work" in the number of 50 people, the test "listening skills" was conducted [17] and the test "assessment of speaking and listening skills" (according to V. Mcleney) [15]. The "Listening

skills" test included 16 questions and "Yes" and "No" answers. The test questions are aimed at identifying students' ability to listen to the interlocutor, demonstrate an attentive attitude during the conversation, control emotions. Questionnaire by B. Mcleney "Speech and listening skills assessment" included 13 points. Students had to answer the statement with "Yes" or "No" options. The questionnaire allowed diagnosing the ability to perceive and analyse information, acquire active listening techniques, and prevent conflict situations. The score for the test methods was calculated as follows: in the "Listening skills" test, all questions with the answers "Yes" were rated at 0 points, all questions with the answers "No" – 1 point, except for questions 11, 12, 13, and

14, which in the case of the answer "no" were also rated at 0 points; in the test "Speaking and listening skills", all questions with the answers "Yes" were rated at 1 point, except for questions 4, 8, 10, and 11, which in the case of the answer "Yes" were rated at 0 points, questions with the answers "No" – 0 points, except for questions 4, 8, 10, and 11, which in the case of the answer "No" were rated at 1 point. In the future, the scores for the two tests were summed up and the arithmetic mean was recognised, according to which the levels of completeness were determined: 10-12 points (high), 8-10 points (sufficient), less than 8 points (low). The analysis has shown the following results (Fig. 3):

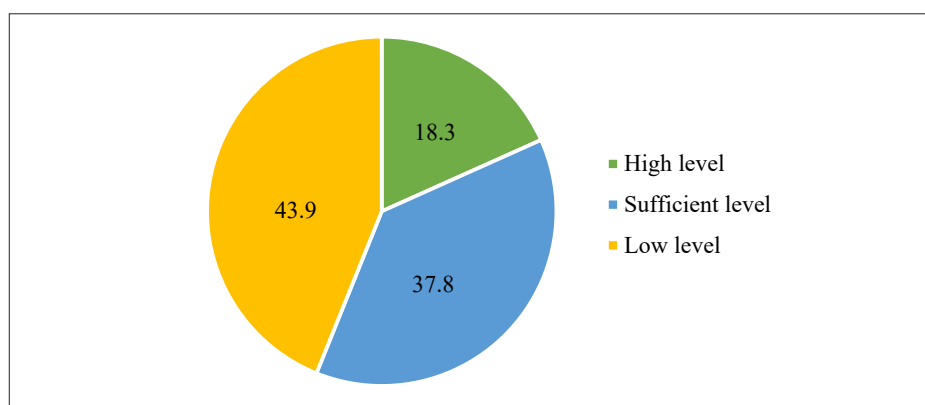


Figure 3. Statistics of levels of listening skills completeness among students of the specialisation "social work" (in %)

As is evident from Figure 3, almost half of the surveyed students showed a low level of completeness of the ability to listen to the interlocutor. The obtained data were considered during the organisation of the formative stage of the study, the main attention of which was directed to students' performance of practical tasks, modelling and acting out professionally directed situations, role-playing and business games, and conducting trainings. After interviewing students using two methods, the training "The art of listening and hearing" was conducted to develop students' and future social workers' skills of active listening and business communication. To achieve this purpose, a mini-lecture "Rules of active listening", a brainstorming session "Techniques of active listening", and a discussion "What does it mean to listen and hear?" were conducted, as well as a number of exercises, the content of which is advisable to consider:

1. Exercise "Can I listen", which is aimed at developing students' and future social workers' skills of active listening. A video camera was used during the exercise. The performance consists of the following stages: students work in pairs (one tells, the other listens). The conversation is recorded on a video camera. The narrator talks about their problems (for example: relationships with parents and friends, points out difficulties related to personal qualities, possible causes of misunderstandings, etc.). The listener tries to follow the rules of active listening, support the interlocutor using active

listening techniques, and remember what they have heard. The conversation duration is 3 minutes. After completing the exercise, the listener should repeat in detail what they heard, comparing their story, the manner of listening with the recording on a video camera. During the discussion, students shared their impressions of the conversation, made comments and suggestions.

2. Exercise "Good advice". The purpose of the exercise is to analyse the presented situations and select clarifying questions. The material used during the exercise includes flashcards with situations, multimedia, a projector, slides with active listening techniques (clarification, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings, summarising). Performance procedure: students are given task cards (each card has 4 professionally directed situations). The task is determined by the need to choose clarifying questions (clarification, paraphrasing, reflection of feelings, summarising) for each situation.

3. Exercise "Talk to the client". Purpose: to teach students to identify professional skills that are important for a social worker. Materials – sheets of A-4 paper, pens. Performance procedure: students work in pairs. Future social workers need to simulate the situation: a social service employee signs an agreement with the client to provide social support to the disadvantaged family, using contact techniques: argumentation, active listening, persuasion.

4. Reflection. During the discussion, students were actively involved in the conversation, discussed, gave their

own arguments, substantiated typical mistakes when listening to the interlocutor, deduced the rules for effective listening, such as: be open and friendly to the interlocutor, try to hear with one's whole body, not interrupt, be attentive, not be distracted during the conversation, help, support if necessary, etc.

At the final stage of the study, students evaluated the effectiveness of the proposed training by filling out

a feedback questionnaire. Thus, to the question of the survey: "How was the training useful? What new things have You learnt?", the following responses were received (Fig. 4).

To the question of the survey: "How do You assess your level of completeness of listening skills", where "1" is the lowest indicator, "5" is the highest, the following data were obtained (Fig. 5):

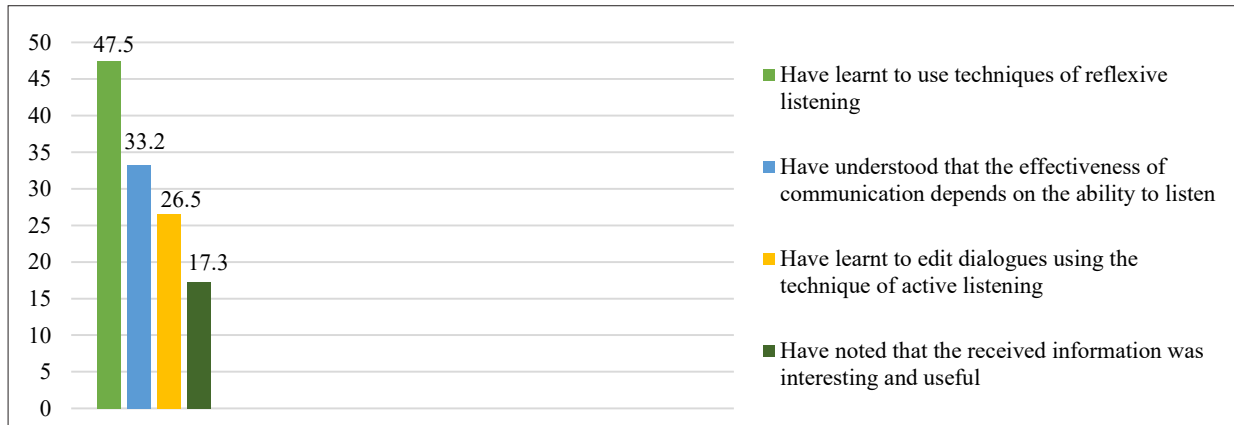


Figure 4. Statistics of answers to the question "How was the training useful? What new things have You learnt?" (in %)

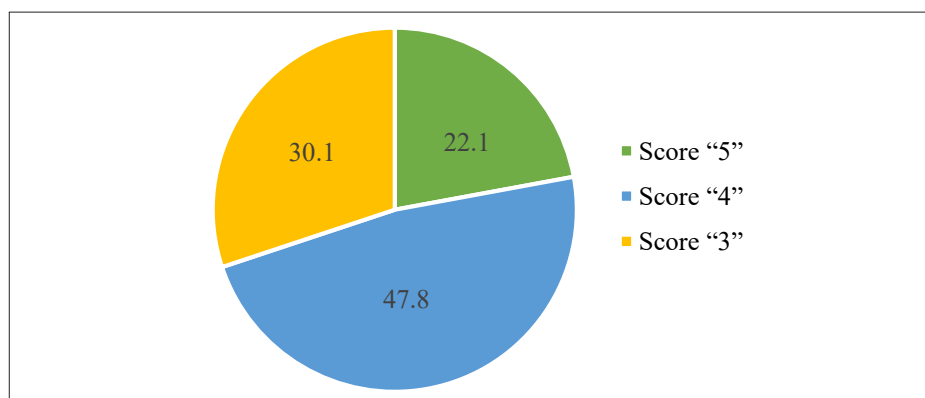


Figure 5. Statistics of students' assessment of their level of listening skills completeness

As is evident, quantitative and qualitative data on the self-assessment of students and future social workers after the training showed higher indicators of the completeness of listening skills than before taking part, as a result of which the authors can assert the effectiveness of such trainings in the process of training future specialists.

Conclusions

The ability to actively listen should be formed and developed in the course of training to carry out effective professional activities of a social worker. The developed ability of active

listening will help the social worker to influence the client, maintain a conversation to achieve a positive result, show interest in what the interlocutor is saying using verbal (clarification, paraphrasing, summarising) and nonverbal means of communication (gestures, posture, facial expressions) to establish interpersonal interaction.

The authors see the prospects for further research in substantiating the methodology for forming the ability to actively listen in the process of training future social workers in higher educational institutions.

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