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# SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES AS ONE OF THE KEY PROFES-SIONAL COMPETENCIES OF THE 21ST-CENTURY GRADUATES

#### D.A. Alexeeva, M.A. Isaikina, S.A. Shilova

**Purpose.** The given article is devoted to the issue of social responsibilities in the educational context. The purpose of the article is to analyze the concept of social responsibilities as one of the main professional competencies and its reflection in educational results of higher education.

**Methodology.** The methods of descriptive and evaluative analysis and synthesis are applied. This work covers the latest research results, normative documents, cur-rent trends in the labor market, as well as issues of psychological adaptability and social responsibility of those to secure the future of the economy. The authors prove that social responsibility is crucial in the 21st century.

**Results.** The necessary conditions for the sustainable development of modern socie-ty are economic stability and continuous professional growth of the participants of social interactions. Higher education aims to develop students' hard skills and their soft skills, which are currently referred to as life competencies. The paper reveals the conditions that need to be created within the framework of the educational pro-cess for the graduates to meet the requirements of the labor market. The work de-scribes the tendencies and the potentials of the higher educational system to provide its graduates with appropriate career trajectories. The ongoing transformation of the Russian educational system carried out according to current requirements of the society, contributes to the relevance of this study. The results of the research can be applied in teaching process at higher educational establishments. *Keywords:* social responsibilities; professional competency; life competency; grad-uates' competitiveness; career trajectory

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Научная статья | Методология и технология профессионального образования

# СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬ КАК ОДНА ИЗ КЛЮЧЕВЫХ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНЫХ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЙ ВЫПУСКНИКОВ ВУЗА 21 ВЕКА

#### Д.А. Алексеева, М.А. Исайкина, С.А. Шилова

Цель. Статья посвящена проблеме социальной ответственности в образо-вательном контексте. Целью статьи является анализ понятия социальной ответственности как одной из основных профессиональных компетенций и ее отражение в образовательных результатах высшего образования.

Методы. В статье применяются методы описательного и оценочного ана-лиза и синтеза. В работе рассматриваются последние результаты исследо-ваний, нормативные документы, текущие тенденции на рынке труда, а также вопросы психологической адаптации и социальной ответственности тех, кто обеспечивает будущее экономики. Авторы доказывают, что соци-альная ответственность имеет решающее значение в 21 веке.

**Результаты.** Необходимыми условиями устойчивого развития современного общества являются экономическая стабильность и непрерывный професси-ональный рост участников социальных взаимодействий. Высшее образова-ние ставит перед собой задачу развивать у студентов профессиональные и универсальные компетенции. В статье раскрываются условия, которые необходимо создать в рамках образовательного процесса для соответствия выпускников требованиям рынка труда. В работе описываются тенденции и возможности системы высшего образования по обеспечению своих выпуск-ников соответствующими карьерными траекториями. Трансформация рос-сийской образовательной системы в соответствии с современными требо-ваниями общества повышает актуальность проводимого исследования. Ре-зультаты исследования могут применяться в образовательном процессе высших учебных заведений.

Ключевые слова: социальная ответственность; профессиональная компе-тенция; жизненная компетенция; конкурентоспособность выпускников; ка-рьерная траектория

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#### Introduction

One of the main factors, which could guarantee a steady and continuous growth of the modern society, is the social responsibilities of its members, who demonstrate them through understanding and fulfilling their responsibilities as part of a social group. According to the system, developed as a result of the pedagogy research carried out by Cambridge analytical tank, social responsibilities are considered a constituent part of the Cambridge Framework for Life Competencies. The term "life competency" is rooted in the concept of Life Skills Education, which aims to develop students' psychosocial competence in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way [10].

In 1993 and 1999, the World Health Organization compiled two documents on Life Skills Education [14; 15]. According to them, life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. The authors of the papers highlight the fact that although life skills are legion and could be culture-bound, the core set of them consists of such psychosocial skills as decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress. A list of descriptive phrases to identify life skills was generated within the discussions on 21st-century skills framework. Not all the items on the list were defined as skills. Some of them were referred to in the document of 1999 as desirable qualities. Thus, it might be supposed that the term "life skills" comprises psychosocial skills and personal qualities.

Such labels often reference the set of life skills as "deeper learning," "21st-century skills", "college and career readiness," "student-centered learning," "higher-order thinking." In 2012, the authors of the study "Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century" used the term "21st-century competencies" when referring to life skills, defining them as the blend of both knowledge and skills and identifying three broad domains of competence, i.e., cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal [16].

The Cambridge Framework for Life Competencies, developed in 2019, is based on the definition of "competency" suggested by the Council of the European Union [18]. Hence, "competency" should be defined as a complex notion consisting of three areas, i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Social responsibilities are viewed as one of the main competencies, whose core areas are understanding social responsibilities as part of a group, intercultural awareness and understanding global issues. These areas are intertwined with such skills, attitudes, abilities and qualities as empathy, assertiveness, active listening, respect, tolerance, sharing, compassion, sociability, self-awareness, making and keeping friends or relationships. All of them are defined as life skills and competencies in the studies mentioned above. However, only in the Cambridge Framework, they are combined in one competency.

In Russian pedagogical and professional contexts, "social responsibility" is not yet defined as particular competency. However, several universal competencies are included in the Russian Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education as desirable educational results, which correlate to the life competency "social responsibilities." These universal competencies are intercultural communication, collaboration and self-organization and self-development. In addition, we believe that social responsibilities may be connected with such universal competency as "civil position" which entered the list of competencies being developed in the educational process of students according to FSES of the higher education adopted in January 2022. It could be if we observe civil position as human participation in the community life, a person's conscious actions in relation to surroundings and his or her values realization at a reasonable ratio of personal and social interests. However, competency description allows concluding that its formation is supposed to be realized in the disciplines of legal science.

### **Materials and Methods**

This paper aims to analyze the concept of social responsibilities as one of the main professional competencies and its reflection in educational processes in Russia and overseas. The objectives are to define the notion of "social responsibilities" as one of the main professional competencies of the 21st century; to explore and describe the relationships between the 21st-century competency "social responsibilities" and successful professional outcomes and benefits for the community; to justify the need for educators and federal agencies to support the development of social responsibilities; to outline possible methods and techniques which could be implemented to teach and assess social responsibilities as one of the key professional competencies.

This type of research is a descriptive study based on the literature review and documentation on 21st-century professional life competencies to reveal the current situation. Obtained data were evaluated and interpreted by the researchers based on the descriptive approach. The review method was conducted as a set of the steps listed below:

- determining the review's purpose, which implied the investigation of the correlation between social responsibilities and sustainable growth of the modern society;
- defining the term "social responsibilities" using the analysis of documents and research papers on 21st-century competencies;
- comparing the interpretations of the competency "social responsibilities" in Russian and global contexts;

- analyzing theories, studies and research papers on the 21st-century competency "social responsibilities" and its impact on the professional success of high school graduates;
- exploring and describing possible ways of integrating teaching and assessing social responsibilities into various areas of the curriculum to equip young people to enable their productive participation in the sustainable society;
- discussion of the results. The data were interpreted considering the implications of the development of social responsibilities in the context of 21st-century education.

## Results

The labor market and the contemporary employer in particular expect from an employee of the 21st century the willingness and desire to improve his or her professional level by mastering new knowledge and new technologies. The focus on life-long learning is a unifying feature of various educational systems. As for our country, continuous training has been one of the important areas of Russian education policy since 1970s up to now. Life-long learning encourages the learners to acquire knowledge and skills for sustainable development and promotion.

The Russian educational system is expected to provide high-quality education, educational competitiveness, as well as bring up a harmoniously developed and socially responsible young generation. "Education", being the national project directed to support the young generation's self-actualization and talents growth, is considered to develop a responsible human community.

According to the "Education 2030" project released by the Federal Institute for Education Quality Assessment, the graduates in the foreseeable future are expected to be independent and aware of the importance of life-long learning as it predetermines the responsibility of a person in the process of creating conditions for turning the situation in the world to the better. The goal of higher education is to prepare the youth for adulthood and inspire them to be active, responsible, and empowered. This project defines three categories of competencies important for students as future professionals – among which there is creating new values, solving problems, taking responsibility as the ability to think creatively and work in a team [7].

Throughout the international forum held recently in St. Petersburg, it was announced that a highly motivated person with stress management, communication skills, strategic and creative thinking is extremely growing because of global automatization, robotization, and widely spread technologies that use artificial intelligence. The features of a relevant specialist as an all-around developed personality with cross-curriculum competencies and a creative and analytical mind are in demand in social and professional fields. Contemporary education should train socially responsible and competitive practitioners [9].

The level of social responsibilities development indicates the level of social evolution. The notion of responsibility may be viewed as fulfilling the obligations in collaborative activities and as personal tasks and duties. Besides, responsibility is considered a kind of human behavior in the community.

Social responsibilities are particularly connected with professional occupation. This fact confirms the necessity of forming social responsibilities and promoting students in practical preparation for a vocational activity. Being the main competency of a future professional, social responsibilities influence the interaction between people.

In 1970, the New Your Times published the study by Milton Friedman, in which the well-known economist wrote that social responsibilities might be examined as the principal element of society [12]. Later it became obvious that people and our environment mutually embraced, and social responsibilities tend to sustainable development. The aims and ideas of social responsibilities make the quality practitioner's professional competency natural and progressive.

In Russia, the issues of social responsibilities have been worked on since the last decades of the 20th century. This concept was analyzed from different points of view by many scientists. It was discussed in the works by philosophers V.S. Barulin [3], N.A. Golovko [5] and others. In morality and psychology, it was elaborated by S.F. Anisimov [1] and A.F.

Plakhotnyi [8]. In addition, K.P. Buslov [4], N.A. Minkina [6] and other researchers examined social responsibility as a personal characteristic.

The social responsibilities may be examined as the relations between a person and a group or the whole community, including citizenship. These relations are based on the conscious fulfillment of mutual duties and obligations arising from social behavior, traditions, and cultural values. The social responsibilities development is carried out under socio-economic conditions of people's political system and spiritual culture. Social responsibilities are also known as duties to exercise the obligation for one's acts and attitudes, while they are the respectful attitude towards individuals and humanity in general. Social responsibilities as a cross-curriculum concept are considered the personal ability to think over and foresee acts and attitudes and self-organization willingness.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we observed the lack of respect for an educated person. It was due to low salaries and a somewhat declining quality of education. It was characterized by the absence of the eagerness to obtain higher education and the possibility to get the degree without any effort. Irresponsible attitude of young people to educational and professional activity was the consequence of degradation of educational tradition and teachers' competency, which had defined the quality of graduates' training and their development as a people with the high level of responsibility.

The notion of social responsibilities may comprise, on the one hand, one's steady personal self-education and, on the other hand, one's attitude towards people, environment and oneself when one's actions and social values are in harmony [2]. The students' social responsibilities as developing competency would be characterized by adaptability to study and to take part in the educational process as learners and future specialists in the chosen field. They are expected to report to the other educational process participants as teachers and co-learners.

The social responsibilities development implies the students' involvement in the simulation of professional communication and professional activity; use of active teaching methods directed to professional competency development as well as the abilities to work out and make decisions; participation in educational projects, which allows students to try different social roles; joining voluntary and charitable work.

The teachers are to encourage students to participate in different community projects to educate them about social responsibilities and raise their awareness of the community issues. They are to make conditions of social responsibilities development as the key professional competency meeting the needs of contemporary society.

According to the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework [19], it is worth noting that social responsibilities are associated with personal responsibility. It is important from the point of view of a social group the student deals with as it helps to create the skills of teamwork, making decisions and taking responsibility for these decisions. It makes the students feel more connected when they are involved in a common activity. In this respect, social responsibilities as a professional competency are valuable in issues of morality, ethical behavior, raising morale in the workplace and setting standards for peers, competition and industry. Moreover, such skills as collaboration, emotional intelligence, appropriate behavior and resiliency are sure to be vital for leadership in professional activity. Teamwork, already mentioned as an important skill for professional proficiency, is also one of the main characteristics of leadership. Graduates learn to fulfill their roles, be creative and full of initiative, and notice the strengths and weaknesses of each team member. This aspect would help them become good leaders in their future professional activities. Leaders among students become leaders at a workplace more often than those with no leadership experience.

Social responsibilities, furthermore, are connected with intercultural awareness. It is important because students learn to respect, understand and appreciate other people and their cultures. It helps to prepare students for interactions inside their own country and worldwide, which allows them to compete in the global labor market after graduating from the university. Students' awareness of their own culture and the culture of the language being studied is gradually developed with the right teaching methods and techniques throughout the educational process. Educational activities motivate students to refer to their lives and find aspects which they feel proud of [13]. In the educational context, intercultural awareness is necessary for successful intercultural communication. There is a need for students' training programs to help reflect intercultural ideas in practical classes to broaden their minds [20].

Speaking of students' engagement and participation in global issues, we should note the influence of contacts, experiences and connections with people from different parts of the world. TV programs and news are significant factors in students' interest in world development matters. The enormous influence of the Internet as the source of expanding global outlook cannot be ignored. Besides, the students obtain information at universities while studying and throughout extra-curriculum voluntary activities. In this respect, self-education plays an important role in the students' development as practitioners. Students' awareness of global issues raises their social responsibilities. The latter is meaningful when students do something about them through social interaction [11].

Some universities state social responsibilities and the ways of their personal development via their offices of career development. Students are advised to try studying abroad or at least traveling to foreign countries. Such experience helps students attain proficiency with a foreign language and immerse themselves in different cultures and communities. Being acquainted with different cultures and comparing them with their one, the students are expected to show interest and gain responsibility for global issues. The development of social responsibilities makes the students understand, articulate, and advocate for what is important to them and engage in activities that match their values. They should keep in mind self-reflection of behaviors, attitudes, and emotional awareness regarding their comfort and their relationships with others. Through competency promotion, the students seek peer assessment and feedback on their strengths and growth areas. Therefore, they participate in peer mentorship, being aware of the impact of their decisions and behaviors on the interpersonal and global levels to be engaged in local and national issues of concerns, community service, and campus organizations [17].

Social responsibilities or, rather, their components are listed in commonly required competencies in the HR leaflets of all major companies around the globe. They are on the competency lists created to inspire and prepare candidates for a job interview or a performance interview. The components mentioned above can be formulated in various ways, but always name the same concepts, such as situational awareness, relationship management, tactical behavior, ethical behavior, managing conflict, responding sensitively, group-oriented leadership, people-driven management, sociability, networking, adaptability, etc.

Various companies use competency lists to ascertain the candidates' awareness of what they are expected to be good at, whether they are naturally capable of doing this well, or they need to work on it. Obviously, the precise list varies depending on a certain position, yet some core elements remain the same and social responsibilities are among those. Moreover, organizations apply the competency lists while hiring new staff and when it comes to career development or promotion. That means that employees are expected to be aware of their career trajectories and the training they might need to follow to get better prospects in the modern world.

Teaching approaches that support the development of 21st-century skills should be implemented within the framework of various university courses. In this context, such methods as task-based and project-based learning (TBL and PBL, respectively) show considerable potential as they emphasize active forms of learning, thus focusing on practicing cognitive and metacognitive skills. Both TBL and PBL encourage and facilitate such active involvement as teamwork, pair work, brainstorming, role play, games and debates. Solving social and emotional problems within the specific context of various university courses, students enhance skills related to the core areas of the competency "social responsibilities."

In terms of assessment, many forms could potentially contribute to the development of social responsibilities, namely alternative forms such as peer assessment, self-assessment, portfolios, competency-based and authentic assessment. These assessment forms could enhance students' reflexive skills and require them to engage with authentic problem-solving.

The need for a new system of 21st-century competencies assessment is perceived as critical and immediate. This system should meet the requirements of the Russian Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education. The meaningful program of assessment should measure different life competencies in general and social responsibilities in particular. When designing the system, one could consider the results of the recent research reflected in the Cambridge Framework for Life Competencies, which contain Can-Do statements, illustrating what kinds of behavior students who are competent in this area might display by the end of each stage of learning. These samples Can-Do Statements could be used as the basis for further development of the descriptors, which would guarantee accurate measurement of students' life competency "social responsibilities".

Social responsibilities are regarded as a kind of interaction among people and understanding the necessity to have obligations. Furthermore, social responsibilities are considered the readiness to face the consequences of one's decisions and the ability to estimate possible implications of decision-making. We determined social responsibilities as the personal capability for self-development, self-education, and lifelong learning and a key professional competency in the framework of soft skills in team-building, collaboration, business ethics, and leadership in professional activity.

Although HR specialists are focused on the importance of social responsibilities as an essential competency for the applicants and candidates, some educational establishments, as those mentioned above [17], still expect their students to acquire and develop this competency independently via extracurricular activities, which in the current economic and social climate does not seem to be enough. Overarching educational programs to develop social responsibilities should be designed and integrated into tertiary curricula.

Social responsibilities as a metacognitive competency should be taught and assessed within a specific discipline or topic area rather than as a stand-alone course. Life competencies have already been taught in many countries worldwide. Still, the proportion of courses with life-competencies orientation, integrated into the different curriculum areas, varies depending on the local economic and social environment. Judging by the results of various studies on life competencies education, it might be supposed that the more support life competencies programs get from federal educational agencies, the greater benefits communities receive as their members become more responsible, understanding, tolerant and resilient.

Educators have been designing courses to develop 21st-century skills. Such courses tend to be taught either as separate disciplines or as parts of a limited range of the humanities. This aspect could also apply to the system of assessment that could be integrated into the curricula of Russian universities should be created according to the Russian Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education. Special attention should be paid to assessing social responsibilities as a key professional competency of the 21st century.

### Conclusion

Being one of the key competencies in the 21st century, social responsibilities are closely connected with collaboration and people interaction in the community. They characterize human behavior and social roles in professional occupations. As a cross-curriculum notion, social responsibilities are of interest in different scientific fields. They are defined as relations between people, between a person and a social group, between a person and citizenship. Social responsibilities imply duties, obligations and rules observed according to tradition and culture and political system and spiritual development. Besides, social responsibilities are interpreted as abilities to predict and estimate the possible consequences of one's acts and decisions that make them extremely important in career development.

Educational institutions and agencies are undoubtedly to pay special attention to this competency development as the element of future practitioners' proficiency. Students should be ready to demonstrate a high level of education, hard skills building and especially soft skills development because the latter has recently increased demand. One of the tasks of higher education is to provide its graduates with competitiveness in the global labor market. Therefore, students are expected to master knowledge, abilities and skills as well as to use them in practice. Social responsibilities imply students' self-education and self-actualization. They presuppose understanding the necessity of life-long learning as the guarantee of being in demand by employers in their country and worldwide.

We consider social responsibilities vital for the development of future professionals. There is an urgent need to design an assessment system of social responsibilities and incorporate various teaching methods and techniques aimed at the development of social responsibilities in the educational process.

**Conflict of interest information**. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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