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Innovations in Economics and Finance Education - Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

Digitalization of the global economic processes has had a great impact on the digitalization of higher education. However, globalization of business, stronger regulations and numerous technological solutions and innovations are not bypassing the economic education either. In recent decades, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of higher education to the development of a knowledge-based economy. Critical thinking and soft skills are essential for implementing innovations in the teaching of economics and finance in higher education. The aim of this paper is to analyse and systematize the key challenges and opportunities, as well as determine the main trends in the use of innovations in higher education. The methodological approach of the present study includes a literature review on the benefits of critical thinking and soft skills in universities. The research questions are related to (1) assessing the impact of innovations used in the teaching of economics and finance on the development of students' critical thinking, as well as (2) whether soft skills in education improve the effectiveness of the learning process. The results of the research confirmed the importance of using innovations in university education for critical thinking and confirm the hypotheses related to the satisfaction of the students with the learning process through soft skills. The results determine that institutions of higher education for the formation of soft skills of students introduce innovative methods and means in the learning process.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Soft Skills, Higher Education Institutions, Economics, Finance, Challenges.

Introduction

The dynamics of modernity, the flow of information and the wide application of digital technologies in people's lives impose the need for critical information processing, global thinking and sustainable local solutions, the implementation of professional activities and their projection into the future. A guarantee of their effectiveness is the critical thinking not only of professionals, but also of the globalizing society. In order to become an inherent trait and quality of the individual, critical thinking goes through a long process of formation and development. The educational system, and especially the professional training of personnel at the university, plays a key role in it. Critical thinking is not only an important part of university education, it is also its goal. On the one hand, critical thinking is essential for the student's active participation in academic life, and on the other hand, for the acquisition of basic professional competencies, as well as their implementation in all areas of professional activity. Innovations in higher education are also focused on soft skills. Soft skills are a combination of social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career qualities, social intelligence quotients, and emotional intelligence, among others, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementary hard skills.

Critical thinking and creativity are becoming increasingly important in higher education and contribute to a better personal and civic life. OECD economies are increasingly driven by innovation. People will increasingly have to contribute to and absorb innovation. Innovation policy typically emphasises the

role of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in innovation; the role of entrepreneurship; and usually emphasises advanced higher education degrees such as doctorates [1].

The ability to generate ideas, choose the most relevant of the proposed ideas, the ability to quickly navigate in new conditions, make forecasting, structuring and systematization are soft skills, without which it is impossible to carry out modern creative productive activities. Therefore, the formation of soft skills is becoming one of the most important tasks solved by higher educational institutions [2]. The education system 's persistent misalignment with the needs of the labor market raises doubts about the university and its role in forming the skills needed to lead a successful and responsible life and for society to face present and future challenges. University teaching practice is often still pervaded by the lecturing method and traditional approaches. In recent times, the growing interest in this topic — coupled with the multiplication of recommendations by various institutions (e.g. EU, OECD) in favor of training and developing soft skills as well as the need for competitive educational provision that meets the requirements of the job market — has meant that most universities are introducing soft skills initiatives [3].

Digital technology currently plays a central role in the (re)construction of higher education identity, both in individual terms – i.e., in the identity of the various factors that make up the institution, namely students, teaching and non-teaching staff and institutional leaders – and in institutional terms – i.e., in the identity of higher education institutions themselves [4]. In this scenario of (re)identity construction of the higher education system and academics themselves in an increasingly digital society, it is critical to rethink the role of academics in the teaching-learning process. On the other hand, these dynamics may be an opportunity for change, reshaping and reinvention of the academy and its place in society. In this process, it is, however, important to safeguard the respect for the academics 'professional autonomy [4]. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) plays a key role in empowering people to change the way they think and act in and in interaction with the world and be active participants in the transformation of society. ESD is transformative inasmuch that it prepares people to be equipped with tools to develop their knowledge, skills, values and behaviors that are fundamental for developing a sustainable future and world. This new educational paradigm is based on the design of an interactive, student-centered and action-oriented teaching-learning process [5].

The actuality of the study is based on the fact that today, the graduates of Higher Education need to master not only professional skills of their job, but also various soft skills, including the ability to communicate, coordinate, work under pressure, and solve problems. The information base of this study is the results of research in Sofia University, Faculty of Economics and Business administration on development on the process of using innovations for critical thinking and soft skills in economics education in the universities.

Literature Review

The term "innovation" can refer to the process of developing an innovation or an output, such as a specific type of innovation. Innovative activities include all developmental, financial, and commercial activities undertaken by an organisation to create an innovation. The organisation of innovation activities can vary for each innovation and between institutions. An innovation can be developed through dedicated projects with an allotted budget, through ad-hoc "back of the desk" activities without a dedicated budget, or as part of regular operations to continuously improve processes or services. Educational organisations (e.g. schools, universities, training centres, education publishers) contribute to product innovation when they introduce new or significantly different products and services, such as new syllabi, textbooks or educational resources, or new pedagogies or educational experiences (for example e-learning or new qualifications). They contribute to process innovation when they change significantly their organisational processes for producing their educational goods or services [6].

There are four policy areas that are relevant to supporting innovation in education [7]. First, the education regulatory framework needs to be conducive to innovation. Second, policies to invest in research and development (R&D) can support innovation. Third, policies need to support forms of work organisation that support individual, organisational and sectoral learning of relevance to innovation. Fourth, the use of appropriate technologies, notably information and communication technology ICT, can be supported by policy, which has many applications in the education sector.

The Nobel laureate in economics James J. Heckman, in an article co-authored by Tim Kautz, states that soft skills are—personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains. […] Soft skills predict success in life, […] they produce that success, and […] programs that enhance soft skills have an important place in an effective portfolio of public policies‖ [8]. Robles also focus on the effects: Soft skills are the intangible, non-technical, personality-specific skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, facilitator, mediator, and negotiator [9]. In the understanding of S.N. Batsunov, flexible skills are a collection of supra-professional skills that contribute to the successful implementation of professional activities, ensuring high productivity and at the same time are not associated with a specific subject area [10]. In the formation of soft skills, the importance of entrepreneurial learning is distinguished (a concept that allows you to translate ideas into life, which includes personal development, the development of entrepreneurial skills) and experiential learning (knowledge of the surrounding reality through understanding your own experience), when first a student gains practical experience, and then implements its comprehension [11]. These are competencies related to the ability to cooperate, be creative, entrepreneurial, the ability to cope with stressful situations, be aware of the future and make appropriate predictions [12, 13]. States that basic soft skills are (1) Content skills: active learning; implementation of oral communication; implementation of written communication and information literacy; (2) Social skills: implementation of coordination; the presence of emotional intelligence; the skill of negotiating; the skill of persuasion and training others; (3) Processing skills: hearing; developed critical thinking; implementation of reflection, introspection and analysis of the activities of others and (4) Technical skills: use of technical capabilities; operational literacy; identification of technical problems.

Creativity and critical thinking are two distinct but related higher order cognitive skills. As such, both require great mental effort and energy and are cognitively challenging. They are related in that they involve some similar thought processes, but their goals differ. Creativity aims to create novel, appropriate ideas and products. Critical thinking aims to carefully evaluate and judge statements, ideas and theories relative to alternative explanations or solutions so as to reach a competent, independent position – possibly for action. Critical thinking mainly aims at assessing the strength hand appropriateness of a statement, theory or idea through a questioning and perspective-taking process – which may in turn result (or not) in a possibly novel statement or theory proposed a simple definition of creativity [14]. Creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e. original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e. useful, adaptive concerning tasks constraints)". Appropriateness recalls that creativity happens within a system or context with its standards and constraints; it is not just about doing something new. As Dennett (2012) puts it: "Being creative is not just a matter of casting about for something novel – anybody can do that, since novelty can be found in any random juxtaposition of stuff – but of making the novelty jump out of some system, a system that has become established, for good reason". While the idea can be traced back to Socrates and has been at the core of western philosophy for centuries, Hitchcock (2018) summarises some recent conceptions by defining critical thinking as "careful goal-directed thinking" – another version of Ennis' definition: "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do [15]. To effectively practice critical thinking, individuals develop and apply several key elements. The key elements of critical thinking are presented in Figure 1.

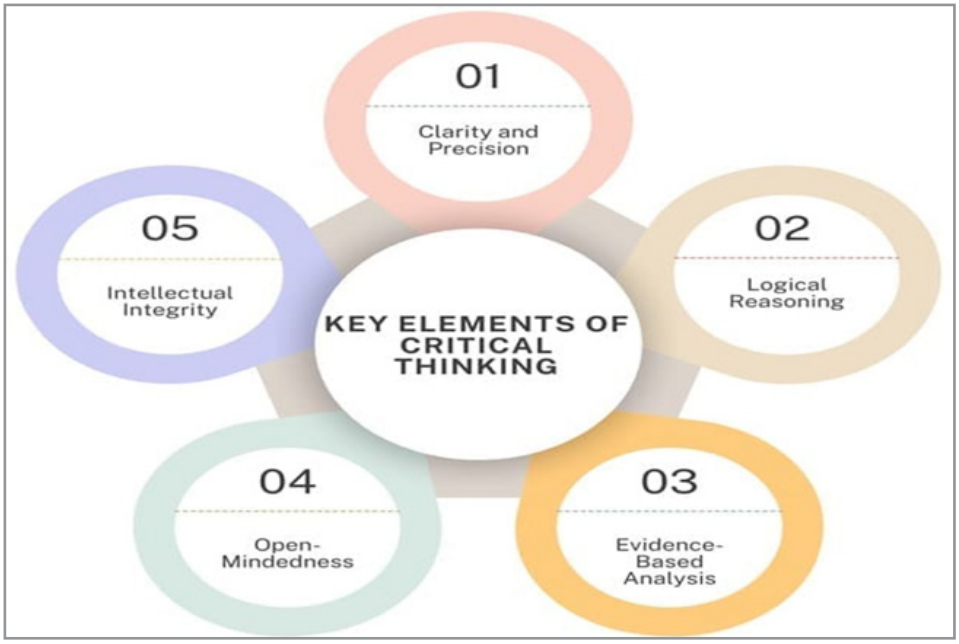

Figure 1: Key Elements of Critical Thinking

In an educational context, both creative and critical thinking pursue deeper understanding of knowledge and solutions, and thus deeper learning. Developing creativity and critical thinking is actually a way to improve learning and get students to acquire more expertise in a domain – whether it leads to the proposition of new knowledge and solutions or not. In education, research on critical thinking usually refers to Dewey (1933) as a key milestone or first famous user of the word in English (although most of the time he talked about "reflective thinking"): "The essence of critical thinking is suspended judgment; and the essence of this suspense is inquiry to determine the nature of the problem before proceeding to attempts at its solution". Critical thinking would thus be an initial scepticism allowing for inquiry, better understanding of the problem at hand before proposing a solution. Applied to education (and higher education), the theory of critical thinking has been developed by philosophers such as Ennis [16-18]. What are the cognitive processes or sub-skills involved in critical thinking? To establish a parallelism with creative thinking, we summarise the underlying macro-processes under the same headings as creativity: inquiring, imagining, doing and reflecting.

Currently, there is a greater awareness of the role of education in the promotion of soft skills and, therefore, new didactic methodologies for their instruction and new methods and instruments for their evaluation are being developed [19]. These issues also highlight the intellectual challenge required in the contemporary science classroom; the social nature of learning, the professional identity of teachers and the acquisition of a professional language related to learning and teaching. In addition, the personal resource input of trainee teachers is increasingly seen as a key factor for effectiveness, innovation and maintaining a healthier and more committed teaching staff [20]. Teacher competency frameworks and professional standards will define what is expected of teachers and what they are able to do, i.e., their pedagogical skills, which are considered key tools to encourage and support teacher quality [21].

The soul-searching that surrounded the teaching of Economics in universities in the past decade has led many to emphasise the importance of confronting economic theories with experimental evidence and empirical data. As highlighted above, this is increasingly done when students are asked to participate in games

and experiments in the classroom. In addition, students should be encouraged to consider the real-world relevance of Economics material encountered [22]. In the 21st century soft skills that are also called “applied” skills or “21st-century skills” are considered an important differentiating factor for achieving job position and success in life. The findings of numerous surveys conducted in the current field have discovered that the role of soft competencies should never be neglected. Including, a study administered by Harvard University notes that 80% of achievements in career is influenced by soft skills and only 20% by hard skills. While results from another study conducted by Stanford Research Institute jointly with the Carnegie Melon Foundation among the Fortune 500 CEOs confirm that their durable and stable success in work 75% is caused by soft skills and only 25% - hard [23].

Methodology

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the data were collected by the literature review and then it was analyzed by the descriptive analysis method. The innovations in economics and finance education through the application of soft skills and critical thinking are explained by tables and classifications. The data collection is based on literature review, research papers and questionaries.

The methodology used is based on general scientific methods of scientific knowledge - analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction, as well as on specific methods, specifically applying the systematic approach, the historical approach, the method of comparison and the abstract-logical method. The information base of this study is the results of research in Sofia University, Faculty of Economics and Business administration on development on the process of using innovations for critical thinking and soft skills in economics education in the universities. The obtained results represent the verification of two hypotheses: (1) assessing the impact of innovations used in the teaching of economics and finance on the development of students' critical thinking, as well as (2) whether soft skills in education improve the effectiveness of the learning process.

The study aims to develop soft skills and critical thinking among university students. The respondents had to vote for soft skills, which, in their opinion, should be formed in higher education students in the first place (those skills that would ensure high demand in the labor market). A survey was conducted among professors and students of higher educational institutions and the most frequent answers were highlighted. The first hypothesis, connected to assessing the impact of innovations used in the teaching of economics and finance on the development of students' critical thinking, was tested by surveying 195 students in Faculty of economics and business administration (FEBA) in Sofia University (SU). The main goal of the conducted research was assessment of the usefulness and satisfaction of games in education in universities. In research in year 2024 from a number of students, they were asked if they had benefited from using games during their studies in 5 subjects such as "Principals of taxation", “Capital markets and risk management”, “Derivatives financial instruments”, “Analysis of Financial Market” and “Managerial Accounting”. The second goal of the conducted research was whether soft skills in education improve the effectiveness of the learning process and proving the second hypothesis. In this regard, the success rate of the students can be determined based on the grades obtained and results at the end of the respective course by using the following function:

$$AoL=f(R, M, K, P\_I) \quad (1)$$

where: AoL - Assurance of Learning
R – result
M- motivation
K- knowledge
P- practice experience
I – interdisciplinary knowledge (Velinova-Sokolova,2024).

The sample is non-probabilistic and consists of 126 professors of FEBA. The age of the respondents in both groups was between 20 and 69 years (age M = 45.79). All participants indicated their agreement to participate in the Research. After agreeing to participate, each teacher answered the Education-focused Personality Inventory (BIP) questionnaire already adapted and used in the educational context and received as feedback a personal profile indicating their interpersonal skills. The tabulated data was analyzed and inferences drawn to interpret the meaning. Simple statistical tools like percentages, averages etc. were used for the analysis of data.

Results and Discussions

Student satisfaction is an important indicator of the quality of learning experience. Hence, the purpose of this part of the study was to investigate the extent to which the potential variables related to critical thinking. The first hypothesis, connected to assessing the impact of innovations used in the teaching of economics and finance on the development of students' critical thinking explores on the one hand, the descriptors of the different key ideas have to relate enough to the concepts as understood by experts in creativity and critical thinking. On the other hand, the descriptors have to be simple enough to be easily understood by teachers and students. The analysis is based on the four characteristics of creativity (inquiring, imagining, doing and reflecting) and their relationship to critical thinking. Table 1 presented questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions for critical thinking on the basis of creativity.

Table 1: Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions for critical thinking

Creativity	Critical Thinking
Inquiring	Understand context/frame and boundaries of the problem - observe, describe relevant experience, knowledge. Identify and question assumptions, check accuracy of facts and interpretations, analyse gaps in knowledge - Make connections to other concepts and ideas.

Imagining	Identify and review alterna-tive theories and opinions and compare or imagine dif-ferent perspectives on the problem - explore, seek and generate ideas. Identify strengths and weak-nesses of evidence, arguments, claims and beliefs - stretch and play with unusual, risky ideas
Doing	Justify a solution or reasoning on logical, ethical or aesthetic criteria/reasoning - a solution or a performance in a personally novel way.
Reflecting	Evaluate and acknowledge the uncertainty or limits of the endorsed solution or position - reflect and assess the novelty of the chosen solution. Reflect on the possible bias of one's own perspective compared to others perspectives.

Source: Authors' own research

The survey combines the subject, and object approaches to measuring innovation. With the permission of and assistance from the instructors who agreed to have their students participate in the study, an online survey link was distributed to 5 courses from the disciplines (mentioned above). The results aim to inspire teachers internationally by making visible the kind of approaches and tasks that allow students to develop their creativity and critical thinking. Table 2 indicates the details of this research.

Table 2: A pedagogical Activity on Creativity and Critical Thinking

№	Type of creativity and critical thinking	N	%
1	Create students' need/interest to learns and ideas, integrate other disciplinary perspectives	105	53.8
2	Develop clear technical knowledge in one domain or more	92	47.2
3	Include the development of a product	86	44.1
4	Deal with problems that can be looked at from dif-ferent perspectives	78	40.0
5	Have students co-design part of the prod-uct/solution or problem	59	30.2
6	Include space and time for students to receive feedback	43	22.0
7	Be challenging	24	12.3

Source: Author owns research

The main insight from this overview is that 48 (or 25%) of the 195 students surveyed on innovation in the education sector are limited to digitalisation, with only five addressing innovation in a more general way. A large majority of surveys contain questions on innovation activities though. The least frequent topics are data and innovation management. The innovation conditions and activities which are coverage are connected with education skills (56%), create or diffuse knowledge (48 %), data management (36%), innovation management (52%), innovation culture (64%) and tech use (78%). Almost all tools ask participants about the organisation's capacity for innovation, whether it concerns financial resources, digital technology, etc. The main factors influencing innovation in education, are covered in the questionnaire: (1)Pro-innovation culture: (a) the organisational capacity for innovations, (b) working culture, incentives, and norms with respect to innovation; (2) Knowledge: (a) staff and student capacity and capabilities; (b) investment in staff training and new initiatives; (c) skill development opportunities, (d) how knowledge is distributed, (e) collaboration within and across the organisation; (f) what is done with new insights at each level of the organisation, and (g) evaluations of innovations; (3) Innovation management: (a) how are processes around new initiatives organised; (b) rules and plans around establishing and managing innovations ; (4) Resources and drivers. The results confirmed the importance of using critical thinking in university education and confirm the first hypothesis.

The presented model for teaching and learning related to critical thinking has its own specific features. As already stated, critical thinking requires the ability to develop information and reflect on it. Therefore, it is necessary to update the students' old knowledge, on the basis of which they can be included in the systematic process leading to the discovery, restructuring and understanding of new knowledge. It is essential for students to understand what they know and what they don't know. Therefore, reasoning and critical analysis require in-depth and creative discussion of how new knowledge can be applied to old knowledge and how old knowledge can be changed to absorb and make sense of new information. It can be said that this model focuses its attention, on the one hand, on accepting and appreciating differences, and on the other, on creating and maintaining interest. Teaching is built primarily on the knowledge and experience of students, allowing them to use appropriate learning styles and strategies, which in turn guarantee the free expression of opinion. Therefore, when teaching a particular economic discipline, it is necessary for the professor to take into account the differences of the students (abilities, experience, interests, potential), and depending on this, orient his methodological, scientific and pedagogical activities. In this sense, the main strategy of the critical thinking development model is to support independent thinking, oriented towards lifelong learning. In order to implement a quality learning process, economics and finance teachers at universities need to take into account and comply with the following requirements: (1) to provoke students to accept or reject ideas; (2) to assist and provoke the active participation of students in the learning process; (3) to provide favorable conditions for learning; (4) to value critical thinking.

Based on the results of the study usually identify two ways of developing flexible skills. Firstly, in the learning process by in-

troducing individual courses, and secondly, using the potential of the studied disciplines in conjunction with extracurricular educational work. The purpose of the second hypothesis is to analyze he formation of professional competencies and soft skills can be carried out in combination, however, if a certain step-by-step is characteristic of hard skills, then there is great variability in the development of soft skills. The signs of the formation of soft skills are presented in Figure 2.

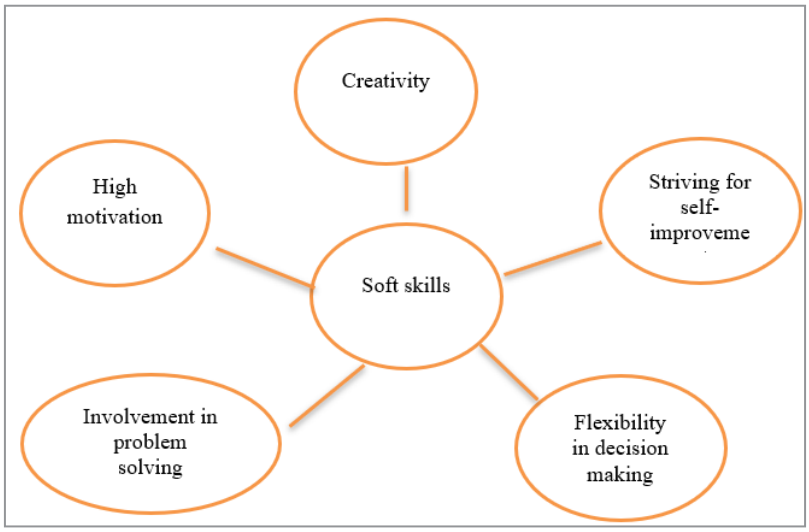

Figure 2: Signs of the formation of soft skills in students.

Source: Pluzhnirova et al, 2021

With the development of this broad set of soft skills, in parallel, naturally, with the more technical training in each curricular area, students will be more capable and prepared to face the labor market, analyzing problems and offering integrated solutions, in a logic of collaborative work. The assumption of this relevance implies that competence training in higher education should be rethought to improve the effectiveness and efficiencies of students' specific and transversal learning. From the data, several types of comparisons and analyses were made with respect to skill. The soft skills that teachers possessed were then related to their digital skills. In addition to cultural factors, the reported differences in skill levels can be traced to the different educational systems and cultures Therefore, when examining the second hypothesis about the use of soft skills being related to (1) Active listening - conceptual understanding, feedback, and confirmation that a message has been effectively understood through cognitive interpretation processes; (2) Communication technologies - skills in the use of new technologies and media for communication of complex information to all members of the organization that aim to gather information, increase learning and/or foster consensus; (3) Creativity - process of evaluating cognitive domains that seek to develop creative ideas; (4) Critical thinking - ability to critically analyze and assess information; (5) Cultural knowledge of self - ability to understand and interpret preconceptions, biases, or displays of incongruence vis-a-vis one's culture and the culture of others; (6) Ethics - rules, standards, codes or principles that guide morally right behaviors and truthfulness; (7) Innovation - conception or development of original or new processes, products or technologies; (8) Problem-solving - the application of problem-solving models and processes in seeking adequate solutions to problems; the ability to integrate information from different sources through the integration of several platforms, functions and technologies. The results obtained from the analysis of the eight specific soft skills requirements are shown in Figure 3.

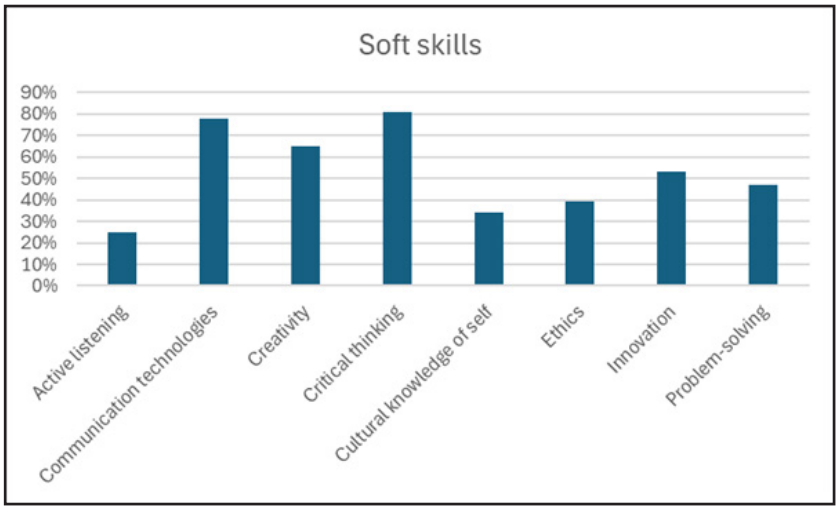

Figure 3: Use of soft skills in higher economics education.
Source: Author owns research

This study suggests that Bulgarian professors have reasons to improve their soft skills in the intrapersonal area, meaning assertiveness and aspects of teamwork; and in the active listening, sensitivity and ethics. Efforts need to be directed towards to work on socialization and problem-solving. It is worth highlighting the difference between skills, given the different challenges of including soft skills in teacher training and curricula in addition to the already present hard skills, which are of a totally different character. Soft skills, being related to the person and the context, can be changeable and adaptable to different situations, which gives them a subjective character and makes them difficult to measure and assess. Competency frameworks and professional standards define what teachers are able to do and what they should know how to do, avoiding the methodological challenges of measuring teacher quality with "proxy measures" such as years of professional experience or student performance. These measures do not report on support for student development or the ability to create learning opportunities. The educational contexts are changing accordingly. They require skills in multi-channel communication, facilitating interaction, flexibility and use of different tools. There are calls for the adoption of open innovation mindset, framework Education 4.0 and Education 5.0, social technologies, digital strategies, and other enabling technologies. Reviews of the development of instruction in higher education have argued for greater variability in methodology and approaches in researching the impact of development initiatives by measuring actual behavioral outcomes. In this way, at least the common pitfalls of traditional self-report questionnaires, such as the difficulty in detecting unconscious processes and the risk of socially desirable responses, can be avoided.

The results of the second part of the investigation have discovered the 15 skills as soft skills that most required in modern work places. Soft skills are grouped into three branches according to their common features, they are personal, social and methodological skills. Table 3 indicates the details of this research, and correlation coefficients of the soft skills studied.

Table 2: The personal, social and methodological skills

№	Type of personal skills (x)	%	ρ(x,y)	Type of so-cial skills (y)	%	ρ(y,z)	Type of method-olog-ical skills (z)	%	ρ(x,z)
1	Learning Skills	21	0,2	Communica-tion	20	-0.3	Improvement	16	0,1
2	Profession-al Ethics	15	0,6	Teamwork	29	0,5	Result orien-tation	22	0,3
3	Commit-ments	8	-0.4	Negotiation	11	0,3	Analysis skills	24	0,4
4	Creativity	25	0,3	Conflict Manage-ment	17	0,7	Decision making	12	0.9
5	Innovation	31	0,8	Leadership	23	0,1	Research skills	26	0.7

Source: Author owns research

These methods ask students to engage in their learning by thinking, discussing, investigating, and creating. In class, students practice skills, solve problems, struggle with complex questions, make decisions, propose solutions, and explain ideas in their own words through writing and discussion. As a result, students became more active in the learning process, which in turn made them more motivated [24-26]. The analysis of the results obtained from the soft skills study also confirms the second hypothesis related to increasing the effectiveness of economics training. In order to analyze the extent to which the development of soft skills affects student success; a correlation coefficient was used. The results of the relationships between the social and methodological skills listed in Table 3 are summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Relationships between the social and methodological skills
Source: Author owns research

Conclusion

In summary, it can be stated that the effectiveness of using the critical thinking model in teaching economics at universities is expressed primarily in the teacher's ability to constantly provoke the interest and curiosity of students, in the use of interactive technologies in the learning process, and in analyzing and summarizing the results of the training. The application of interactive strategies and techniques in the learning process implies both active individual activity and teamwork skills. The use of critical thinking enables the full use of already acquired knowledge and its transformation into new knowledge, complemented by pleasant emotions and experiences. The advantage of interactive strategies related to the development of critical thinking is expressed in the possibility of forming in students social skills necessary for their full realization (skills for understanding, for evaluating and expressing a position, for articulating one's own opinion, for taking responsibility and working in a team).

Recent changes in the education and digitalisation system and labor market have placed higher education on the use of innovative teaching tools. In order to achieve this purpose, universities must not only transmit knowledge and abilities that are specific to each discipline or occupation, but must also develop so-called soft skills, meaning dispositions and attributes that are transferable to many occupational situations and areas. In this connection, it seems necessary to establish a robust framework of soft skills based on theoretical and empirical research. Though there are numerous studies on this subject, soft skills are constantly changing properties and require constant redefinition. The results of the study and analysis developed point toward the need for a new academic culture and greater interdisciplinarity in the higher economics education arena, understood as the promotion and use of synergies from several scientific fields [27, 28].

The higher education culture of interdisciplinarity enables and promotes the development in students of soft skills, which are valued, more than ever before, by the labour market, through a transformation of the teaching-learning processes toward new and innovative pedagogical approaches and curriculum flexibility, and distancing from the more expository and traditional methods. Therefore, the importance of related training and strengthening of these skills in university teachers should not be underestimated and will make a difference to the quality of effective teaching and learning. While there is evidence supporting the importance of soft skills such as communication, creative thinking, problem solving and teamwork in university teaching practice. It is important to consider the incorporation of soft skills courses in the teaching curriculum in order to motivate teachers and improve the values of humanistic pedagogy, which would promote the pedagogical culture and generate forms of continuous learning. Future research in this topic should, then, look closely at this re-shaping of higher education teaching-learning processes, assessing whether these fundamental changes are taking place.

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