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## SOFT SKILLS AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY: ANALYSIS OF INTERCONNECTION IN THE EDUCATION OF FUTURE GRAPHIC DESIGN PROFESSIONALS

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### ABSTRACT

The **purpose** is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the correlation between soft skills and indicators of creative activity among future graphic design professionals, utilizing methods of theoretical analysis of educational standards. The relevance of this research is determined by the necessity to develop soft skills and creative activity in future professionals in graphic design within the framework of the contemporary job market.

**Methodology.** Theoretical methods involve a review of scientific literature to understand existing perspectives and research on soft skills and creative activity, aiming to elucidate key concepts and theories. Analysis and synthesis are employed to scrutinize educational programs, standards of People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United Kingdom (UK), and industry-specific criteria in graphic design, identifying key elements related to soft skills and creative activity.

**Results.** The study characterizes and clarifies that educational standards recognize the importance of cultivating "soft skills" in future graphic design professionals. It highlights the interaction and complementarity of soft skills and personality traits, which define specific knowledge and abilities and reflect distinctive characteristics and values. The research compares soft skills (communication, creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, and time management) with specific personality traits (interest, originality,

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*independence, initiative, and energy) in the context of their interrelation in the field of graphic design.*

**Conclusions.** *Soft skills and indicators of creative activity are interconnected and mutually reinforce each other in the process of graphic design projects. Soft skills provide the foundation for the effective utilization of indicators of creative activity. It is pointed out that further research is needed to determine the levels of development of creative activity among future professionals in graphic design concerning the identified indicators.*

**KEYWORDS:** *China, Educational Program, Educational Standard, Great Britain, Higher Education, Personality Traits.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of soft skills and personality traits in the educational process is a key aspect of preparing future professionals in graphic design. This helps ensure their competitiveness in the job market and a successful career in the field of graphic design. In the educational process, the development of soft skills and personality traits for future professionals in graphic design takes on special significance.

Students should learn to tackle creative tasks using various approaches, experimenting with different styles and techniques. This helps foster their creativity and analytical skills. Students must be adept at collaborating effectively in a team, receiving constructive criticism, and working on their own shortcomings. This contributes to the development of communication skills and the ability to work within a team.

Soft skills and indicators of creative activity are an integral part of the personality of a graphic design professional and manifest themselves in the design process. These competences and qualities not only assist graphic design professionals in effectively performing their duties but also have an impact on the quality and success of projects. There is no defined, singular approach to determining the personal qualities a graphic design professional should possess.

The issue of defining the personality traits of a designer is highlighted by Dubberly, noting that with the development of technology, traditional design skills are no longer sufficient, and a modern designer needs to be well-versed in contemporary technologies (2011). Bazilyuk also asserts that a designer should be proficient in the fundamentals of design and shaping, be knowledgeable about cutting-edge materials and technologies, and simultaneously have an understanding of psychology and economic issues (2015).

Kunrath, Cash, and Li-Ying (2016) also point out that the development of a designer's personality has technical and human aspects. Fursa (2013) indicates that the qualities of a designer's personality are dictated by the socio-economic demands of society.

The requirements for the skills and personality of a graphic design professional are specified in state education standards, program documents of educational-professional programs, and manifestos of design councils.

In the national standards for the quality of professional education at the bachelor's level issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (PRC) regarding the design specialty, it is specified that graphic design professionals should possess

creative thinking, aesthetic judgment, scientific working methods, teamwork skills, and have a broad international perspective and a keen sense of time. They should also have skills in self-expression, communication, and collaboration, as well as aesthetic abilities, basic skills in innovation and entrepreneurship, basic skills in document search, design research, data analysis, and competence in planning (Jiàoyùbù gāoděng xuéxiào, 2018).

In the program document of the national educational-professional program of the College of Arts and Design at Wuhan University of Technology, specializing in visual communication design, it is noted that students should possess basic knowledge of innovative design and communication, organizational skills, the ability to plan design activities, problem-solving skills in design projects, specific communication tools, the ability to utilize various means of self-expression, professional skills and methods in creating artistic design, aesthetic abilities, and a desire and capacity for life-long learning. They should have the ability to adapt to the development of design innovations, a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration, logical and dialectical thinking, critical awareness, and practical methods of design thinking, as well as creative consciousness. (Wǔhàn Lǐgōng Dàxué, 2017).

In the 2019 “Subject Benchmark Statement for History of Art, Architecture and Design,” developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education of the United Kingdom (QAA), upon which educational programs for the graphic design specialty are based, the following skills are specified and grouped as follows:

- 1) Open-mindedness: the ability to perceive new things and ideas and assess different points of view.
- 2) Autonomy: the ability to develop independent reasoning based on authoritative sources in the subject area and formulate arguments.
- 3) Information: skills to use various current and new digital technologies, demonstrating digital literacy.
- 4) Time management and personal initiative: the ability to work according to instructions and deadlines, including managing parallel projects.

In the program document of the international educational-professional programs of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UK) and Wuhan University of Technology (PRC), such goals as creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual exploration, teamwork skills, openness to diverse ideas, and the ability to work independently are listed. Education seekers should demonstrate self-development, individual approaches, personal organization and management; use a high level of subject-specific abilities, unconventional thinking, and creativity; synthesize ideas and aesthetic sensibilities and apply them to solve creative problems (University of Wales Trinity Saint David & Wuhan University of Technology, 2013).

In the *Design Education Manifesto* issued by the International Council of Design (Icograda, 2011), it is noted that a designer is capable of identifying and formulating problems collaboratively, exploring possibilities through critical thinking, creativity, experimentation, and evaluation. Additionally, designers easily adapt to technological changes, and willingly take on the challenge of learning and mastering new methods of visualization and communication concepts across various media, using so-called “smart materials.”

The strategy of the Design Council of the United Kingdom outlines the direction of work for the next four years, identifying key priorities in design activity. It also emphasizes the crucial importance of developing design skills in our current and future workforce. According to the definition of the Design Council of the UK, design skills involve the ability to take an idea and bring it to life. Design skills constitute a set of abilities and a unique way of thinking about a problem, combining materials to achieve function, and creating meaning that leads to new ideas. Design skills are crucial as they enable one to understand the complexity of a task, apply different solutions, develop viable solutions, create action plans, generate new ideas, collaborate, critically and creatively comprehend the design process, combine different ideas, and demonstrate originality. Among the skills applied by designers are creativity, originality, initiative, critical thinking, attention to detail, flexibility, problem-solving ability, and emotional intelligence (Design Council, 2020).

Skills have become critically important for success in the job market and for personal development. For example, the report by the World Economic Forum titled “The Future of Jobs” (2018) highlights this significance. It emphasizes that skills related to technological development, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration will be keys to a successful career in the future.

Hendarman, Cantner, and Hendarman (2017) resort to defining tangible and intangible skills, and Fan, Wei, and Zhang (2005) resort to defining cognitive and non-cognitive skills, which they also characterized as “hard” and “soft” skills (Hendarman, Cantner, & Hendarman, 2017; Fan, Wei, & Zhang, 2005; Hadiyanto, Noferdiman, Moehaimin, & Yuliusman, 2017). Soft skills are abilities that are not directly related to the technical proficiency needed for a specific job but are crucial for success in any profession.

Studies carried out by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Stanford Research Center have collectively determined that 85 percent of success in a job is attributed to possessing refined soft and interpersonal skills. In contrast, only 15 percent of job success is derived from technical skills and knowledge (hard skills) (National Soft Skills Association, n.d.).

As per the *Harvard Business Review*, with the advancement of automation and AI, soft skills—those qualities that machines are incapable of replicating—are gaining increased significance (Chamorro-Premuzic & Frankiewicz, 2019). And these findings aren't unique, the 2019 LinkedIn Global Talent Trends report revealed that 92 percent of talent professionals emphasized the significance of soft skills, asserting their equal or greater importance compared to hard skills in the hiring process.

Furthermore, 80 percent of respondents indicated the growing importance of these skills for overall company success (Lobosco, 2019). Based on the results of research data, it is crucial and necessary to primarily develop soft skills. Freitas and Almendra (2021), in their research on soft skills in the context of design education, identify that, among more than twenty defined skills, communicative skills, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and inquisitiveness are deemed the most significant by respondents from 26 countries.

In our study, we will rely on soft skills, such as communicativeness, creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, and time management. These skills can be highlighted in the analysis of educational standards in China as well as in the United Kingdom. This study

includes academic-professional programs for graphic design professionals at the bachelor's level (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019; University of Wales Trinity Saint David & Wuhan University of Technology, 2013; Jiàoyùbù gāoděng xuéxiào, 2018; Wǔhàn Lǐgōng Dàxué, 2017). The combination of these skills specifically helps a designer to solve design problems, as noted in the *Design Education Manifesto*, which emphasizes that a designer identifies and formulates a set of problems, solves them by combining critical thinking, creativity, experimentation, and evaluations (Icograda, 2011).

The **aim** of the article is to conduct comprehensive analysis of the correlation between soft skills and indicators of creative activity among future graphic design professionals.

## METHODOLOGY

The research employs approaches based on theoretical methods. Theoretical methods include a review of scientific literature to elucidate existing perspectives and studies on the topic of soft skills and creative activity, aiming to understand key concepts and theories. Analysis and synthesis involve studying and analyzing educational programs and standards, as well as industry standards in graphic design, to identify key elements related to soft skills and creative activity.

## RESULTS

Skills and personal qualities can be considered separately, yet they are often interrelated and influence each other. The connection between skills and personal qualities varies depending on the specific situation and context. Some skills may depend on certain personal qualities for their successful application, while other skills may contribute to the development of specific qualities.

For instance, in their research, Lima Rua and Maia (2023) examine the correlation between creativity and soft skills. This correlation is also indicated by Nohara, Norton, and Kawano (2017). Bohdan (2023) classifies types of soft skills based on the classification of personality qualities. In his studies related to creative intelligence, Guilford (1962) hypothesized that creative activity is dependent on accumulated skills, thus, indicating a correlation between creative activity as a personal trait and skills.

The correlation between soft skills and personality traits, which indicate a level of creative development, may be grounded in the idea that successful graphic design professionals should possess not only technical knowledge but also a set of personal qualities that contribute to their creative productivity. Soft skills concerning future graphic design professionals can correlate with personal qualities that can serve as indicators of creative activity in the following way:

1) Communicativeness-interest: communicativeness involves the ability to effectively communicate with others, while interest indicates stimulation and satisfaction from project design tasks. Communicativeness and interest are crucial aspects of the graphic design project process. Communicativeness includes not only the ability to express ideas and concepts but also the ability to listen and understand other project participants. Effective communication with clients, colleagues, and other stakeholders is important

for understanding their needs and requirements, as well as for the successful implementation of project tasks.

The ability to communicate clearly and comprehensibly contributes to reducing misunderstandings, improving collaboration, and ensuring high-quality execution of graphic design projects. The research of scholars such as Wang (2022), Rovida, Gianotti, and Zafferri (2022), and Malouf (2011) demonstrates that communicativeness significantly influences success in the field of graphic design. On the other hand, interest serves as a powerful motivator for graphic design professionals.

Engaging in projects that spark interest and stimulate creative potential can contribute to better outcomes. Interest in the design process encourages deeper exploration of the subject, experimentation with new ideas and approaches, as well as the discovery of unique and original solutions.

2) Creativity and originality: creativity involves the ability to generate new ideas and think unconventionally, while originality indicates the capacity to demonstrate innovative and creative approaches. In the graphic design process, creativity and originality are crucial elements contributing to the success and distinctiveness of a project. Creativity includes the ability to generate new ideas and approaches that can alter perspectives and create unique concepts. It allows designers to find unconventional solutions and go beyond ordinary approaches.

On the other hand, originality signifies the ability to demonstrate innovative and creative approaches in work. This means that a graphic design professional has the ability to achieve uniqueness and distinctiveness in their projects, utilizing creativity to create something new and impressive.

Creativity and originality are key factors that differentiate high-quality graphic design from the ordinary, adding a unique style, aesthetics, and emotional charge to the project. The ability to generate new ideas and apply them in the creative process helps solve problems, engage, and captivate the audience. Research confirms that creativity is one of the key soft skills defining success in graphic design, as indicated by scholars, such as Lopes, Correia, and Machado (2022) and Visser, Chandler, and Grainger (2017).

3) Problem-solving–independence: problem-solving involves the ability to analyze complex tasks and find effective solutions, contributing to independence in work. In the graphic design process, problem-solving is a crucial skill that helps designers analyze complex tasks and find effective solutions. This includes the ability to understand project requirements, identify potential issues the project might face, and develop strategies for resolving them.

The importance of problem-solving skills for future professionals in graphic design and problem-solving abilities is highlighted in the research of scholars such as Yan (2020). Problem-solving requires an analytical and critical approach to tasks. The designer must grapple with the problem, identify various possibilities and solutions, and then choose the most effective path.

This includes the ability to pinpoint key factors, conduct research, analyze data, and make informed decisions. Problem-solving also promotes independence at work. Designers should be capable of independently analyzing tasks and seeking solutions

without constant direction or supervision. This allows designers to be more autonomous and self-reliant in their work, contributing to better outcomes.

4) Critical thinking and initiative: critical thinking involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and challenge ideas and solutions, fostering initiative in implementing new ideas and projects. Gavrysh and Dotsenko (2021) defined critical thinking as an individual ability to find effective solutions based on existing stereotypes and developed criteria.

Yin Li Ming (2021) emphasizes the importance of cultivating innovative thinking. In the process of graphic design, critical thinking is a necessary skill that helps designers analyze, evaluate, and challenge ideas and solutions. Critical thinking involves the ability to understand the project's context, consider it from various perspectives, and formulate reasoned thoughts and assessments. Critical thinking allows designers not only to accept ideas but also to analyze them for potential problems or shortcomings.

This skill contributes to the improvement and refinement of projects while preventing possible errors. A designer with the ability to think critically identifies flaws and opportunities for improvement, leading to the creation of more successful and effective solutions. Critical thinking also stimulates initiative in implementing new ideas and projects. A designer who can critically evaluate ideas and develop their own approaches brings a fresh and original perspective to the work process. They foster initiative, explore new opportunities, and make daring decisions, promoting creativity and innovation.

5) Time management and energy: time management involves the control of time and resources, which can support energy in task execution. In the process of graphic design, time management plays a crucial role in ensuring the efficiency and success of tasks. Time management includes the management of time and resources, allowing designers to effectively allocate their time, prioritize tasks, and use resources optimally.

The importance of time management is emphasized in research by scholars, such as Malouf (2011) and Zeegen (2009–2011), who note that real-world projects are accompanied by deadlines and constraints. Energy in task execution is an important characteristic of the design process. Time management helps designers preserve energy through rational planning and effective control of working hours. This helps avoid overload, stress, and exhaustion while ensuring proper focus and productivity during work.

Efficient time management also allows for the allocation of time for creative experimentation and exploration. Through thoughtful planning and organization of time, a designer can set aside periods for generating new ideas, seeking inspiration, and creatively refining their work. This contributes to conserving energy and maintaining motivation to perform design tasks.

## DISCUSSION

A comparative analysis of educational standards of China's (Jiàoyùbù gāoděng xuéxiào, 2018; Wǔhàn Lǐgōng Dàxué, 2017; University of Wales Trinity Saint David & Wuhan University of Technology, 2013) and the United Kingdom's (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019; University of Wales Trinity Saint David & Wuhan University of Technology, 2013) expected outcomes of educational and professional programs, soft skills, and indicators of creative activity can be represented in the form of a table.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of requirements from national standards for professional teaching at the bachelor's level, expected outcomes of national and international educational-professional programs with flexible skills, and indicators of creative activity for future graphic design professionals*

<b>Subject benchmark statement for History of Art, Architecture and Design (UK)</b>	<b>Data on national standards for the quality of professional teaching at the bachelor's level in higher education institutions (China)</b>	<b>International educational-professional program of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David at Wuhan University of Technology in the field of graphic design</b>	<b>National educational-professional program in the field of visual communication design at Wuhan University of Technology</b>	<b>Soft skills</b>	<b>Indicators of creative activity</b>
Information	Communication skills	Teamwork skills, effective collaboration with others	Proficiency in communication tools	Communicativeness	Interest
Initiative, openness to new things	Creative thinking, innovation	Creativity, ability to generate ideas, conceptual thinking	Proficiency in self-expression, innovation	Creativity	Originality
Autonomy	Design research skills	Research and creative inquiry skills	Problem-solving abilities	Problem-solving	Independence
Open-mindedness	Aesthetic abilities	Critical evaluation, analysis, aesthetic sensitivity	Aesthetic abilities	Critical thinking	Initiative
Time management	Activity planning	Independent workload management, adherence to deadlines, ability to work independently	Artistic design practice abilities	Time management	Energy

**CONCLUSIONS**

Soft skills and indicators of creative activity are interconnected and complement each other in the process of graphic design. The comparison of soft skills and personal qualities contributes to understanding how a graphic design professional can effectively leverage their technical skills in the creative domain. It also sheds light on how they organize and develop their personal attributes to achieve success in this field. Soft skills provide the foundation for the effective utilization of creative activity indicators. The interaction between skills and personality traits creates a favorable environment for the successful development and implementation of projects in graphic design.

It has been established that indicators of creative activity, such as initiative, energy, interest, independence, and originality, also play a crucial role in the graphic design process. The alignment of soft skills with indicators of creative activity regarding the educational process of future graphic design professionals has been demonstrated. Critical thinking is linked to initiative. Problem-solving is associated with independence. Creativity contributes to achieving originality. Communicativeness is reflected in interest. Time management indicates energy.

Further research is needed to determine levels of development of creative activity among future professionals in graphic design concerning the identified indicators.

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### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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АНОТАЦІЯ / ABSTRACT [in Ukrainian]:

### ГНУЧКІ НАВИЧКИ ТА ТВОРЧА АКТИВНІСТЬ: АНАЛІЗ ВЗАЄМОЗВ'ЯЗКУ В ОСВІТІ МАЙБУТНІХ ФАХІВЦІВ З ГРАФІЧНОГО ДИЗАЙНУ

**Мета** – провести комплексний аналіз взаємозв'язку між гнучкими навичками та показниками творчої активності серед майбутніх фахівців графічного дизайну, використовуючи методи теоретичного аналізу нормативно-правових актів у галузі освіти. Актуальність цього дослідження визначається необхідністю розвитку гнучких навичок та творчої активності у майбутніх фахівців графічного дизайну в умовах сучасного ринку праці.

**Методологія.** Теоретичні методи включають огляд наукової літератури для розуміння чинних поглядів та досліджень щодо гнучких навичок та творчої активності для розкриття ключових понять і теорій. Аналіз та синтез використовуються для дослідження освітніх програм, стандартів Китайської народної республіки (КНР) та Великобританії, а також галузевих критеріїв у графічному дизайні, ідентифікації ключових елементів, пов'язаних із гнучкими навичками та творчою активністю.

**Результати.** Дослідження характеризує та уточнює, що освітні стандарти визнають важливість розвитку "гнучких навичок" у майбутніх фахівців графічного дизайну. Висвітлюється взаємодія та доповнюваність гнучких навичок та якостей особистості, які визначають конкретні знання, вміння та навички, а також відображають характерні особливості та цінності. Дослідження порівнює гнучкі навички (комунікація, креативність, розв'язання проблем, критичне мислення, тайм-менеджмент) із конкретними якостями особистості (інтерес, оригінальність, самостійність, ініціативність, енергійність) в контексті їх взаємозв'язку в галузі графічного дизайну.

**Висновки.** З'ясовано, що гнучкі навички та показники творчої активності взаємопов'язані та взаємодоповнюють одне одного у процесі проєктування графічного дизайну. Гнучкі навички надають основу для ефективного використання показників творчої активності. Окреслено, що подальшого дослідження потребує визначення рівнів формування творчої активності майбутніх фахівців графічного дизайну щодо зазначених показників.

**КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА:** Китай, освітня програма, освітній стандарт, Велика Британія, вища освіта, особистісні риси.

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