

## Formation of professional competencies of a future foreign language teacher in the field of distance education

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to evaluate the opinions of teacher candidates and teachers related to foreign language teaching through distance education and to make forward-looking recommendations in line with these views. The study group consists of 30 teacher candidates who studied foreign language teaching at various universities in Kazakhstan during the 2020–2021 academic year and 35 English teachers who teach English in secondary schools in Almaty. The study was carried out within the scope of qualitative research and research data were collected with two semi-structured interview forms created by the researcher. The data obtained from the research are categorised by content analysis. As a result of the study, teacher candidates found distance education more inefficient in education than formal education and inadequate to provide distance education. Teachers, on the other hand, saw distance education as advantageous in terms of saving time and space, disadvantaged by student motivation, teacher inexperience and technical glitches. As a result of the research, it has emerged that urgent solutions are needed to eliminate the need to provide a separate education on distance education to teacher candidates and teachers, student motivation and technical problems.

**Keywords:** distance education, advantages of distance education, disadvantages of distance education, foreign language teacher candidates, foreign language teachers, teacher opinions.

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## 1. Introduction

The pandemic process, which affected the whole world, has radically changed the needs of the age. Although it directly affected the way individuals lived, it caused many sectors to be reshaped. While education is at the forefront of these sectors, distance education has emerged as the new form of application of education. The modern-day development of societies has accelerated with the active inclusion of the Internet in all areas of human activity, including education. First of all, the Internet provides an important opportunity for both students and teachers in the field of distance education (Arnold and Ducate, 2006).

### 1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Keegan (1996) stated that there is a lot of confusion about the terminology of distance education, so it is necessary to define distance education, stressing that the theoretical structure of distance education cannot be created without a common opinion.

Distance education is an alternative educational practice in which teachers and students are involved in the learning process independently of the physical environment, flexible learning opportunities are created and increasingly important in the world (Tuncay and Uzunboylyu, 2010). Distance education has an important purpose that allows the masses to receive education on site and on time (Demir, 2014). Distance education should not be considered a newly introduced application today, but it should be noted that it has become a mandatory feature of the higher education system (Iron and Iron, 2014). Distance education is an alternative for students who are older, working and have difficulty accessing the school to benefit from educational opportunities. Therefore, the quality of distance education planning and applications is important (Bogdanova, Glazova and Korostelev, 2019).

At this stage, the learning process and the technologies used in this process are of great importance. The use of intensive technology, which occurs with the modernisation of the training process and its move to the online platform, attracts the attention of many domestic and foreign researchers (Ulyanova, Khodakova and Shchukina, 2016; Abdykhalykova and Shalgynbaeva, 2018). The main reason for this is that the implementation of online education in educational programmes as an alternative to traditional education has become increasingly common in recent years (Gottlieb, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic process has led to a radical change in educational practices and schools have been closed and the spread of the disease has been tried to be reduced. While this measure is an act of civil solidarity, it is also a mandatory action to protect public health. However, it is thought that this initiative and change will increase inequalities, especially in the education system, and negatively affect disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the long term (Gewin 2020). Through these assumptions and possibilities, continuous solutions are produced in order to ensure that education can be maintained on an uninterrupted online platform all over the world and that its quality does not decrease.

### 1.2. Related research

There are many difficulties in learning a foreign language. A teacher not only teaches students language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, but also helps, facilitates and encourages students to have enthusiasm, good attitude and motivation towards English (Songbatumis, 2017). In addition, teachers need to think and plan what students are learning, how and why this learning affects them and how lessons can be useful to them in the future (Derakhshan and Shirmohammadli, 2015; Tavoosy and Jelveh, 2019).

While many problems are encountered even in cases where all this occurs in a classroom environment, solutions to the ways, advantages, disadvantages and problems encountered in the distance education process, which is becoming increasingly common and even the necessity of the

period we live in, have been the subject of research in numerous studies (Rebysheva and Vasilchenko, 2015; Digtyar, 2019)

In his study, Gold (2001) discussed teachers' views on distance education and presented the problems encountered and solutions. As a result of the research, some teachers stated that distance education makes learning easier, while the vast majority emphasise that distance education makes the student lazy. In addition, the lack of material in distance education has been expressed as a separate problem area. In the study, it was underlined the fact that teachers who teach with distance education should manage the process well.

In her study on the advantages and disadvantages of distance education, Kuzmina (2012) cites inadequate computer literacy of teachers and lack of experience in distance education, stating that teachers and students are not ready for distance education and find formal teaching more useful. In addition, the lack of information communication infrastructures in Russia and the complex process of motivating the student are also cited among the disadvantages of distance education in the study.

In their study, Shestopalov and Suvorova (2020) stated that remote learning has a positive aspect such as flexibility (the ability to autonomously adjust the speed, order and control of material presentation), while also carrying hidden negative aspects such as slower progress in learning. Tatarinov (2019) also emphasises the importance of benefiting from educational technologies in today's world, where distance education is becoming increasingly common in his research, where distance education addresses the challenges and opportunities for students.

In their study, Fire and Gold (2008) examined the attitudes of students towards distance education and revealed the effect of previous distance education situations, computer use experiences and perceived computer use skills on learning.

Anderson (2020) also evaluated the impact of distance education on students in his study. In the study, it was emphasised that the servant is not only a place of education but also a socialisation area, that distance education causes inequality between students and that learning teaching activities are difficult. In addition, it has been stated that distance education forces teachers, parents and students to think critically, solve problems, be creative, communicate and cooperate. In Žammit's (2020) study, the familiarity with technological tools is cited as one of the advantages of distance language education, while describing stress due to the use of technology as a disadvantage.

When the researches are examined, the use of technology and the role of the teacher in the distance education platform are extremely important. In addition, studies measuring student success in distance education courses are also found. This study is important because there has not been a study in the literature that discusses the professional qualifications of future foreign language teachers and the process evaluations of distance education of foreign language teachers in the field of distance education.

### *1.3. Purpose of the research*

The purpose of this research is to make determinations and recommendations for the creation of the professional qualifications of future foreign language teachers in the field of distance education.

Accordingly, the following sub-objectives will be sought within the research:

1. Do teacher candidates find distance education advantageous compared to formal education?
2. Do teacher candidates find themselves sufficient to provide distance education?
3. What are the views of foreign language teachers on the advantages of distance education?
4. What are the disadvantages of distance education for foreign language teachers?

## 2. Method and Materials

This section contains information about the research model, research group, data collection tools and analysis of the data.

### 2.1. Research method

This study, which used qualitative research methods, was carried out in a descriptive pattern. Qualitative researches often use preferred methods for collecting qualitative data such as observation, interview and document analysis in order to present perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in their natural environment. It can be defined as research in which the process is followed impartially. Basic qualitative research deals with the way people build their world, the meanings they add to their experiences and their way of interpreting their lives. In qualitative research, the researcher resorts to words and explanations using the opinions obtained by qualitative data collection methods rather than numbers to reflect what he has learned about the phenomenon (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015).

### 2.2. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 30 senior students studying foreign languages at various universities of Kazakhstan in the 2020–2021 academic year and 35 English teachers who teach English in secondary schools in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of teacher candidates participating in the study

Age	Gender		Sum
	Female	Male	
<b>17-23 Years old</b>	14	8	22
<b>24-30 Years old</b>	3	5	8
<b>Sum</b>	17	13	30

Considering the distribution of senior students who participated in the study and studied foreign languages, it is seen that 17 were girls and 13 were boys. In addition, age distributions are provided in Table 1 in the form of 8 participants aged 17–23, 22 and 24–30 years. It is seen that the majority of the teacher candidates who participated in the study were between the ages of 17 and 23.

Table 2. Demographic distribution of English teachers who participated in the study

Professional experience	Gender		Sum
	Female	Male	
<b>0-5 Years</b>	2	3	5
<b>6-10 Years</b>	5	4	9
<b>11-15 Years</b>	6	7	13
<b>16 Years and up</b>	3	5	8
<b>Sum</b>	16	19	35

16 female and 19 male teachers participated in the study. Teachers' professional experiences are categorised as 0–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years and 16 years and above. It was determined that the vast majority of teachers who participated in the study had 11–15 years of experience (Table 2).

### 2.3. Data collection tools

In this study, two different data collection tools prepared by the researcher were used. The first covers two closed-ended questions created as a result of demographics related to the age and gender of teacher candidates studying foreign languages and literature review. The other data collection tool is a semi-structured interview form consisting of two open-ended questions prepared to take the opinions of secondary school foreign language teachers about their age, gender and experience periods and distance education. Both data collection tools prepared for the research were created with the opinion of four experts. In addition, it was ensured that the forms were filled out by three foreign language teachers in order to measure the clarity of the questions in the interview forms. After the pilot trial of the interview forms, it was determined that there were no problems in the content and format and the data collection process was started.

### 2.4. Data collection process

Data of the study were collected with interview forms created by the researchers. The forms created were delivered by email to the teacher candidates and teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. In the email system, communication can be carried out online or in a way that involves in-depth and multiple email exchanges without the need for simultaneous format (Kazmer and Xie, 2008). Two interview forms created for the research were delivered to teacher candidates and teachers via email, enabling the collection of data.

### 2.5. Data collection analysis

Since the research is a qualitative research and one of the data collection tools consists of open-ended questions, the open coding method was used by analysing the content in the evaluation of the data obtained. Open coding is defined as the determination and classification of phenomena indicated by the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) listed the process steps to follow in the open coding process as follows: (1) determination of phenomena: events, ideas based on a sentence, paragraph or text are named to describe a phenomenon; (2) creation of categories: after certain phenomena are defined and categories are grouped around them; (3) naming categories: categories are also creative and perception is named to have as many logical relationships as possible with the data it defines. The closed-ended interview form created for teacher candidates has also been categorised and made into a table. Interview forms were scrutinised and direct excerpts from participant opinions were made to ensure the reliability of the research's analyses and to eliminate researcher bias. TC code was used for teacher candidates and T code was used for teachers.

## 3. Results

The opinions of the teacher candidates on which the distance education and formal education are more advantageous are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Do teacher candidates find distance education advantageous compared to formal education?

Categories	F	%	Participant expressions
I find it advantageous	6	20	TC7; I find distance education advantageous. It saves time. Students and teachers save time with on-site teaching.
			TC14; I think that distance education provides the student with more one-to-one work than formal education.
			TC 20; I think distance education is more advantageous. It supports the student's use of technology and encourages

			the student to gain the habit of learning in a computerised learning environment.
<b>I do not find it advantageous</b>	24	80	<p>TC4; I find formal education healthier. Children are deprived of the opportunity to socialise in school in distance education.</p> <p>TC12; The learning environment at school allows the student to learn in a more disciplined and motivated way.</p> <p>TC15; In many ways, formal teaching is more advantageous. The student-teacher relationship, the student-student relationship is much stronger in school.</p> <p>TC29; Distance education is a big problem, especially for young children. It is more difficult for them to concentrate on the course and understand the course than the classroom environment in formal education.</p>

As shown in Table 3, 80% of the teacher candidates find formal education more advantageous than distance education. The reasons for finding it advantageous are mostly centred on reasons such as the school being a socialising environment, increasing student motivation and healthier communication. Those who find distance education more advantageous than formal education make up 20% of teacher candidates. Time savings, the ability to use technology and encourage one-to-one work are among the advantages of distance education by teacher candidates.

The opinions of teacher candidates regarding their competence in providing distance education are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Do teacher candidates find themselves sufficient to provide distance education?

Categories	F	%	Participant expressions
<b>I find it enough</b>	9	30	<p>TC11; I find myself sufficient to use technology in education. I believe I can overcome difficulties in distance education.</p> <p>TC12; Although I find distance education more advantageous than formal education, I believe that I will not have problems with teaching in a computer environment because of my mastery of technology.</p> <p>TC 26; I believe I will be successful in endearing and teaching students the lesson.</p>
<b>I don't find it enough</b>	21	70	<p>TC2; The education we receive at the university does not cover online education. So I can't say I'm qualified.</p> <p>TC6; I've never had a computer-taught experience before. I'm also concerned about motivating the student.</p> <p>TC23; I think online education is very different from the classroom environment. I don't think my education in this field is enough.</p> <p>TC30; I think distance education is a more stressful education model. I don't have enough experience managing that stress yet.</p>

As shown in Table 4, 70% of the teacher candidates do not consider themselves sufficient to provide distance education. The inadequacy of the education they receive, their inexperience and concerns about providing student motivation are among the reasons why teacher candidates do not consider themselves sufficient. 30% of teacher candidates stated that they felt sufficient. In general, teachers think that they will be sufficient to provide distance education due to their proficiency in the use of technology in education.

Foreign language teachers' views on the advantages of distance education are given in Table 5.

Table 5. What are the views of foreign language teachers on the advantages of distance education?

Categories	F	%	Participant expressions
<b>Saving time</b>	26	74,2	T3; Time spent on the road is saved in distance education. At the beginning of the course, both the teacher and the student become more vigorous. T28; There's no time and fatigue to go to school. I think that's a significant advantage.
<b>Being independent of place</b>	21	60	T11; I think the lack of restraint in the place of learning provides a more comfortable learning environment. T17; It is very enjoyable for both the student and the teacher to teach in an environment where they will feel comfortable.
<b>Being economical</b>	19	54,2	T4; A budget must be set aside for the school trip. In distance education, the need to allocate such a budget disappears. T5; Since you are away from home in formal teaching, you need to spend some needs and on the road. Distance education is more economical in this respect.
<b>The student has the chance to watch the lesson again</b>	15	42,8	T1; Since the courses are enrolled in the system, students have a chance to watch again. T22; If there is something that the student does not understand, he can watch it again and reinforce the subject.
<b>Ensuring a variety of materials</b>	12	34,2	T7; In order to motivate the student to the course, it is necessary to colour the course with new materials all the time. Thus, uniformity is eliminated, as in formal teaching. T23; I try to provide a variety of games, activities, inventory in class so that the children do not get bored. Thus, a more pleasurable household can come from the classroom environment.
<b>Supporting individual learning</b>	9	25,7	T12; When students do not understand a topic, they have the opportunity to repeat it while watching the lesson again. The student is becoming individualised in completing his shortcomings. T16; The student expects everything from the teacher in formal education, and when the education is remote, the student plays an active role in learning.



<b>Ensuring fast and easy communication</b>	3	8,5	T14; Students are learning to communicate through technology. And because they're more careful, communication is more rigorous and fast. T27; Communication is easier for students.
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When the Table 5 is examined, 74.2% of the teachers defined the advantage of distance education as saving time. 60% of the teachers expressed independence from the space, 54.2% being economical, 42.8% having the chance to watch the course again, 34.2% providing material diversity, 25.7% supporting individual learning and 8.5% providing fast and easy communication as advantages of distance education. The vast majority of teachers stated that the time spent on the road to go to school in formal education is not spent in distance education, which is an important advantage.

Foreign language teachers' views on the disadvantages of distance education are given in Table 6.

Table 6. What are the disadvantages of distance education for foreign language teachers?

Categories	F	%	Participant expressions
<b>Low class participation rate</b>	32	91,4	T1; Students are reluctant to attend classes. They're making excuses not to attend class. T2; Students are more disciplined about coming to school. When classes are online, attendance is lower.
<b>Difficulty providing motivation</b>	28	80	T7; Students get bored of class quickly. It's hard to get them to listen to the lesson with interest during class. T13; The children's attention dissipates immediately. They get bored so fast. I'm having a hard time adapting them to class.
<b>Inability to process interactive lessons</b>	22	62,8	T5; It is easier to answer questions and questions while the course is being processed in the classroom environment. Students do not want to participate in the course in online education. T9; The lessons are mostly one-sided. I try to increase their attendance by asking students questions, but they're afraid.
<b>Lack of one-on-one care with students</b>	18	51,4	T10; It's hard to take care of the students one by one. You have to give a lecture that appeals to the general public. T24; The learning speed of the students is not the same, but it is not possible to take care of each one individually.
<b>Inability to use different learning methods and techniques</b>	16	45,7	T14; It's hard to get students to do group work. Activity is difficult. I have to teach with a straight-up technique. T22; When teaching in a computer environment, there can be a uniform course functioning. The course time is spent motivating students and trying to explain the subject. It's hard to use different methods.



<b>Technical problems</b>	12	34,2	T26; The lack of Internet reception, disconnection and computer problems sometimes negatively affect the course functioning. T35; The computer can freeze, there may be problems with sound and video. These problems cause the course to be divided and inefficient.
<b>Students' lack of social environment</b>	11	31,4	T2; At school, students were socialising. For them, extracurricular activities are as important as lessons. They don't get that chance in online training. T8; Students' feelings of friendship, solidarity and cooperation do not develop. In fact, these shares have a positive effect on the course. In distance education, the student cannot socialise.
<b>Teachers' inexperience in online education</b>	9	25,7	T7; I've never taught online before. That's why I had trouble with how to run the class. Certainly for this, an in-service training was required. T32; There's a big difference between telling the class in class and telling it on a computer. Class management is completely different. I didn't know how to approach students, how to motivate them, so I made my own way. It would be very helpful if I had been trained in this.
<b>Problems with measurement evaluation</b>	4	11,4	T20; Students are worried about exams. It is also difficult to observe their progress as students do not actively participate in the course. T33; I find it difficult to assess the student's learning progress in class, as students are reluctant to participate and often remain silent.

When Table 6 is examined, 91.4% of the teachers stated that the low rate of course participation is one of the disadvantages of distance education. The disadvantage of distance education is that 80% of the teachers have difficulty in providing motivation, 62.8% cannot teach interactive lessons and 51.4% do not have the opportunity to deal with students one-on-one. Teachers stated that 45.7% of different learning methods and techniques could not be used, 34.2% experienced technical problems and 31.4% said that students were deprived of social environment. In addition, while 25.7% of the teachers pointed to the online education inexperience of the teachers in distance education, 1.42% of them mentioned the problems related to measurement and evaluation.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that foreign language teacher candidates do not find distance education advantageous compared to formal education. There are many studies on the negative perception of distance education in the literature (Bower, 2001). It is clear that there is a need for the creation of the infrastructure in distance education applications, the preparation of course content and its effective presentation and use at all levels from pre-school to higher education and graduate level (Can, 2019). The research findings reveal that teacher candidates do not find themselves sufficient in distance education. In his study, Falowo (2007) emphasised that teachers should receive a special education in the field of distance education in order to improve themselves and to activate teaching with innovative practices.

Within the scope of the research, foreign language teachers were asked about the advantages of distance education. The majority of the teachers stated that saving time, being independent of the place, being economical and providing the student the chance to watch the lesson again are important advantages. Uzoglu (2017) also reached similar results in his study; teacher candidates, distance education; It has been revealed that the advantages of being independent of time and place, being economical and being accessible to learning resources again. Fertikova (2017) argued in her research that distance education has become more effective, thanks to the use of modern technology. She stated that distance education gives the student the opportunity to study at a convenient time without leaving home or the office, and the cost of such education is lower than traditional forms by reducing the costs of travel, accommodation and the organisation of the courses themselves.

When foreign language teachers are asked for their views on the disadvantages of distance education, the problems generally appear as problems arising from the student, the system and the teacher. Insufficient student participation in the lesson, low motivation and the inability to teach interactive lessons are shown by teachers as the most important problems of distance education. Cheng and Chau (2016) emphasised that the most important problem is the lack of communication in their research in which they revealed the negative aspects of distance education. They revealed that the communication and interaction between the teacher and student is effective on the student's participation and interest in the lesson, and that it is much more difficult to achieve this in online education than in formal education. Research findings reveal that teachers point out the technical problems caused by the use of technology among the disadvantages of distance education. Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) also offered solutions in parallel with the results of the research in their studies and concluded that providing technical support, material support and pedagogical training to teachers would play an active role in solving the problems that may arise in distance education courses. Yashina and Goreva (2019) also pointed out that the scientific and pedagogical practices of universities in Russia and Kazakhstan should be arranged in accordance with distance education. In addition, it was emphasised that it has become a necessity for universities to consider distance education practices in teacher training.

In the study, teachers also indicated that students' deprivation of social environment is among the disadvantages of distance education. Renzhina (2020) evaluated distance education from the point of view of teachers, students and parents in her research, and stated that students want the chance to at least see their friends one last time while graduating from high school. She also stated that students come together on the Internet instead of a real meeting, and the fact that this meeting does not take place on a real platform affects the students negatively.

When the findings of the study and other studies in the field are examined, a complete system has not been established for teachers, teacher candidates and students in distance education, regardless of the course. In addition, the problems arising from technology-based learning also prevent the system from fully functioning.

## **5. Conclusion**

Teaching practices through distance education offer an important learning opportunity that can be applied for individuals who cannot directly benefit from formal education or in situations where formal education cannot be directly benefited.

Distance education applications have become widespread all over the world in an unprecedented way during the pandemic period that has affected the whole world and spread over the last few years. The transition of all formal education to distance education without the opportunity to make a long-term plan programme has caused various difficulties in practice.

This research covers the views of foreign language teacher candidates and foreign language teachers about education carried out through distance education. As a result of the research, the majority of teacher candidates stated that formal education is a more effective form of education

than distance education. In addition, foreign language teacher candidates stated that they are not ready for teaching through distance education yet and that they do not find themselves sufficient in this regard. When foreign language teachers were asked about the advantages of distance education within the scope of the research, they generally agreed that it saves time and space and encourages students to learn individually. Regarding the disadvantages of distance education, teachers stated that there are problems arising from the teacher, the student and the system. As a result of the research, there were partial advantages of distance education, but it was concluded that teacher candidates and teachers did not look at distance education positively for a healthy learning. Considering the findings of the study and other researches in the field, it is important to increase the quality of distance education practices in order to achieve the targeted success in education.

## 6. Recommendations

Making distance education applications more effective depends on developing solutions for the identified problems. In this direction, teacher, student and system-oriented solutions should be developed.

For teacher candidates, distance education applications should be added to the university education system and the teachers of the future should be prepared to teach in the field of distance education.

Teachers should be informed about in-service training courses, distance education practices, methods and techniques and material usage.

It should be aimed to increase student success by making online professional guidance applications to increase students' motivation and increase course participation.

Minimising the technical problems that may occur in the distance education process depends on the elimination of internet infrastructure problems, the fact that each student has a computer and Internet at home, and the computer usage skills of the teacher and the student. Relevant institutions are responsible for the elimination of technical problems.

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