Formation of communicative competence of foreign university students through technologies

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to reveal the views of foreign students in order to establish their communicative competences through technologies. This research was conducted with the phenomenological pattern, one of the qualitative research designs. Study data were collected through semi-structured interview forms prepared separately for each of the foreign students. The sample of the study consisted of 40 foreign students studying at various universities in Kazakhstan in the 2022–2023 academic year and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. Apart from the questions asked to determine the demographic characteristics of the foreign students participating in the research, such as their gender and department of education, two closed-ended and two open-ended questions were asked about the formation of the communicative competences of foreign students. While preparing the research questions, the literature was used and the questions were presented to the experts for their opinions and then took their final form. As a result of the research, the answers given to the question asked about the difficulties foreign students face in communication were complicated language, adjustment problems, loneliness and thinking of doing wrong. The answers given to the question regarding the determination of technology use in the formation of foreign students' communicative competencies were podcasts, discussion/chat rooms, instant messaging, blogs and wikis and social networks.

Keywords: Foreign university students, technology, communicative competence;

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1. Introduction

Communication is the most basic skill that human beings have and it is a product of human existence. It is easily affected by all kinds of changes and developments in the way of existence (Barry, Lee, & Messerschmitt, 2012). In the current century, rapid developments in information and communication technologies have greatly affected all systems of society. Communication technologies play an important role in the processing, reproducing, storing and sharing of information in this process of change. One of the systems affected by these rapid developments in information and communication technologies is the education system (Mikre, 2011). Information and communication technologies have also been used effectively in foreign language teaching. While only language classes were used in foreign language teaching with the traditional method, nowadays these have been replaced by multimedia activities and access to technological devices to be used in language learning has become easier (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik , 2014).

1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Humans are social beings and have to communicate with those around them to continue their daily lives. Although communication between people can be achieved by many methods such as gestures and mimics, pictures and signs, no tool can provide communication as effectively as language. Although language has many definitions because it is a versatile system, it is a tool that provides communication between people in the simplest way (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).

In the last 20 years, there have been irresistible rapid developments in many areas around the world. In parallel with this, alternative high-tech communication tools have started to proliferate rapidly (Baxter, Enderby, Evans, & Judge , 2012). Using information technologies significantly affects learning (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). In the century we live in, where the Internet and technology develop and change rapidly, societies keep up with this rapid development and make changes in their own systems. Education, which is one of these social systems, is greatly affected by the results of technological developments. In other words, the Internet and information technologies have become an important part of learning strategies (Ryan, Scott, Freeman, & Patel, 2000).

The first examples of the use of technology applications in education started with the use of microcomputers in the 1960s. Later, with the invention of personal computers and the rapid spread of the Internet, language laboratories developed with computer technologies were established and language teaching made a rapid development. With the emergence of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching in the 1970s, concepts such as the social dimension of language, the use of original materials, being a means of interpersonal communication, body language and interaction emerged (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Technology support in language teaching has come to the fore in studies, conferences and seminars held almost all over the world.

It is possible to mention that there are many advantages of technology-based education programmes enriched with multimedia tools. Some of the advantages of using technology in education are that the learning materials prepared with the support of technology can reach everyone without time and place restrictions, meet the needs of learners with different learning styles, provide learners with the opportunity to control their individual learning experiences, provide simultaneous communication to a large number of people, increase motivation by making learning fun and use technology in education (Sydorenko, Myers, & Nakhimovsky, 2008).

1.2. Related research

In this section, researches on the formation of communicative competences of foreign university students through technologies are examined and presented.

Stockwell (2010), in his study to determine the effect of the mobile platform, stated that audio broadcasts have positive results such as providing language learners with various audio and visual resources, providing important opportunities for interaction and increasing interaction and offering teamwork opportunities. Rashtchi and Hajihassani (2010), in their study to investigate the effect of

blogs on the reading skills of university students, stated that blogs have positive contributions to reading skills and that blogs increase students' motivation towards learning. Ariffin and Yaacob (2014) found that blogs increase student motivation to participate in activities and encourage collaborative learning. Blackstone, Spiri, and Naganuma (2007), in their study investigating students' attitudes towards blog use, found that the use of blogs to increase writing skills was positively expressed by students.

Abdel-Hack and Helwa (2014) conducted a study with undergraduate students to investigate the effectiveness of using digital storytelling and weblogs teaching in developing their story writing and critical thinking skills, and found that students who use digital storytelling have significantly higher scores on story writing skills than those who do not. Abdul and Aly (2008), in their study to evaluate the web pages used for language learning, stated that web pages are useful for learners. Aljumah (2012) investigated students' attitudes towards blog use in writing classes. At the end of the term, the majority of students stated that they had positive attitudes about the activities they did on the blog in writing lessons. They also stated that blogs are motivating, useful and an effective system for improving writing skills. Similarly, in a study investigating attitudes towards blogs, Nicolaou and Constantinou (2014) stated that the majority of students participated in all of the blog activities and their attitudes towards blogs were positive.

1.3. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to reveal student views in order to create communicative competences of foreign university students through technologies. In accordance with the purpose of the study, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. What is the communicative competence of foreign university students through technology?

2. How is the use of technology by foreign university students in creating their communicative competence?

3. What are the difficulties that foreign university students face in communication?

4. What are the views of foreign university students on the creation of their communicative competence through technology?

2. Method and materials

2.1. Research method

The research was designed using the phenomenological method, which is a qualitative research method. The phenomenological method is an effort to grasp the essence of phenomena and beyond emotions and events. In other words, it is an introverted subjective method used to reach the essence and focuses on the facts that we encounter in our lives, that we are aware of but do not have a detailed understanding of. Phenomena can appear in different forms such as events, situations, orientations, experiences, perceptions and concepts in the world we live in (Creswell, 2007). For this reason, it was found appropriate to use the phenomenological method in our research..

2.2. Participants

The study sample consisted of foreign university students studying at a university in Kazakhstan. Demographic data regarding the gender and classes of foreign students are presented in Table 1 and data on the departments of foreign students are presented in Table 2.

In Table 1, the distribution of foreign students participating in the research by gender and the classes they study is given.

Table 1. Distribution of foreign students by gender and class of education

Class	Gender		Sum

	Female	Male	
1st Class	7	5	12
2st Class	6	7	13
3st Class	4	2	6
4st Class	9	-	9
Sum	26	14	40

In Table 1, the gender and class distribution of the foreign students participating in the research are given. Of the students participating in the study, 26 were female and 14 were male. There are 12 students attending first year, 13 students attending second year, 6 students attending third year and 9 students attending fifth year. When Table 1 is evaluated, it is seen that the majority of the students participating in the research are women, and there are foreign students attending the second year the most and third year the least.

In Table 2, data on the departments studied by the foreign students participating in the research are given.

Table 2. Data on departments studied by foreign students

Section	Number of students
Veterinary medicine	7
Engineering faculty	12
Preschool	6
Psychology	9
Music education	6
Sum	40

In Table 2, the distribution of foreign students participating in the research regarding the department they studied is given. 7 of the students participating in the research study are in veterinary medicine, 12 are in engineering, 6 are in preschool teaching, 9 are in psychology and 6 are in music education. When Table 2 is evaluated, it can be seen that the majority of foreign students participating in the research study are in the engineering faculty.

2.3. Data collection tools

The data used in the research were collected through face-to-face interviews by obtaining information from each participant through a 'semi-structured interview form'. A draft interview form was created by examining the studies on the subject in the literature. The draft interview form was submitted to the opinion of three experts and the questions in the form were arranged and finalised. In the interview form, three questions were asked to determine the demographic characteristics of the foreign student, including the gender, the class he/she attended and the department he/she studied, and four different questions were asked to reveal the students' views in order to establish the communicative competencies of foreign university students through technologies, and the students were asked to answer these questions. The 'semi-structured interview form' is shown at the end of the research in Appendix.

2.4. Data collection process

Semi-structured interview forms prepared for use in the research were collected at the school by reaching foreign students. The interviews were conducted during the hours when the students studying at various faculties were not having classes. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and verbal and written consent was obtained from each participant. In order to ensure anonymity in the research, it was stated that each participant would be given a code (A1, A2, A3 …). In addition, the participants were told that they could leave the research whenever they wanted to.

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The questions in the semi-structured interview form were asked to foreign students through face-to-face interviews. The interviews were recorded. It took an average of 20 minutes to answer the forms.

2.5. Data collection analysis

The audio recordings taken during the interviews in the research were transcribed at the end of the interviews and a 42-page data set was obtained. The data collected with the interview form were coded. Coding is the classification of data according to titles, concepts and themes. After the codes were determined by the researcher, they were presented to the experts for their opinion to ensure reliability, and the latest status of the themes and interview data were reviewed (Wilson, 2015). The data were subjected to descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis and the main purpose is to summarise and interpret the data obtained according to the themes (Wilson, 2015).

Based on the interview questions for descriptive analysis, a framework was created for data analysis. Then, themes and sub-themes were created (Dawson, 2009). The views of the participants supporting the themes, along with their codes (A1, A2, A3 …) are included under each table by quoting directly. In terms of the reliability of the study, common themes and sub-themes were decided and are given in tables with frequency and percentage calculations.

3. Results

3.1. Opinions of foreign university students on the formation of their communicative competence through technologies

The communicative competence status of the foreign students participating in the research was collected in four categories: their communicative competence; their use of technology to create their communicative competence; the difficulties they encounter in communication; and their views on the use of technology for the formation of communicative competences.

Table 3 includes the views of foreign students on their communicative competence.

Table 3. Opinions of foreign students on their communicative competence

Communicative competence status	F	%
Very good	1	2.5
Good	8	20
I'm undecided	4	10
Bad	21	52.5
Very bad	6	15

In Table 3, the views of foreign students participating in the research on their communicative competence status were evaluated. 2.5% of the participants expressed their communicative competence as very good, 20% as good, 10% as undecided, 52.5% as bad and 15% as very bad.

In Table 4, the views of foreign students on the use of technology to create their communicative competences are given.

Table 4. Opinions of foreign students on the use of technology to develop their communicative competence

State of using technology	F	%
Anytime	17	42.5
Often	19	47.5
Sometimes	2	5
Rarely	1	2.5

Never	1	2.5

In Table 4, the use of technology in order to establish the communicative competence of foreign students participating in the research is evaluated. 42.5% of the participants stated that they always use, 47.5% often use, 5% sometimes use, 2.5% rarely use technology to build their communicative competence and 2.5% never use technology to build their communicative competence.

In Table 5, the views of foreign students regarding the difficulties they encounter in communication are examined.

Table 5. Difficulties faced by foreign students in communication

Themes	Reasons	*F*	%
Language is complex	Differences in a new language	13	32.5
	Confusion with simultaneous learning of many new information		
	The alphabet is different from the mother tongue alphabet		
Compliance problems	Adapting to a different culture	12	30
	Adapting to lessons		
	Adapting to the environment		
Loneliness	Difficulty finding friends	5	12.5
	Being anti-social		
Thoughts of doing wrong	Fear of humiliation	10	25
	Not afraid to use wrong sentences.		

In Table 5, the opinions of the participants regarding the difficulties they encountered in communication were evaluated. 32.5% of the foreign students who participated in the research stated that they had difficulties in communication due to 'complex language', 30% due to 'adjustment problems', 12.5% due to 'loneliness' and 25% due to 'thoughts of making mistakes'.

Some of the opinions of foreign students regarding the difficulties they encounter in communication are given below.

Foreign Student Code A 24: *I want to practice language to improve my communication, but I don't have enough friends. After school, I usually speak with my family or friends from my own country in my mother tongue, which prevents me from improving in communication. I think this is the root cause of my difficulties.*

 Foreign Student Code A 31: *Most things here are very different, sometimes I don't understand what is being said due to the complexity of the language, it seems like everyone speaks very fast, I have difficulty understanding the lesson, especially when trying to take notes in the lessons.*

Foreign Student Code A 37: *In fact, I design the sentence I need to form in my head, but I do not say all of what I want to say. I can't act the way I want when communicating for fear of making mistakes and being humiliated.*

Foreign Student Code A 40: *I am trying to adapt to both school and a new environment, and when learning and developing a different language is added to this, things get even more difficult. I'm trying to communicate, but sometimes my compatibility problems create obstacles.*

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In Table 6, the views of foreign students on the use of technology for the formation of their communicative competences are examined.

Table 6. Opinions of foreign students on the use of technology for the formation of their communicative competence

Themes	Reasons	*F*	%
Podcast	Ease of listening anywhere	9	
	Ease of finding podcasts by interest		22.5
Discussion/chat groups	Possibility of mutual communication		
	Having a large number of users	5	12.5
İnstant messaging	Free	8	20
	Archiving possibility		
	Free		
	Archiving possibility		
Blogs and wikis	Supports autonomy and creativity		
	Supports global communication	7	17.5
Social networks	Collaboration opportunity	11	27.5
	Daily social interaction opportunity		

In Table 6, the views of foreign students participating in the research on the use of technology for the formation of their communicative competences are evaluated. The opinions of foreign students were gathered in five categories: 'podcast', 'discussion/chat groups', 'instant messaging', 'blogs and wikis' and 'social networks'. 22.5% of the foreign students stated that they listen to podcasts, 12.5% of the students discussion/chat groups, 20% of the students instant messaging, 17.5% of the students blogs and wikis and 27.5% of the students technologies such as social networks should be used in the formation of communicative competences of foreign students.

The opinions of some students regarding the use of technology for the formation of communicative competences of foreign students are given below.

Foreign Student Code A 14: *The method I use most to ensure my communicative competence is the instant messaging method. I can communicate with people around the world who are trying to learn a foreign language like me or with my school friends whenever I want. The biggest advantage of using this method is that the other person responds quickly to my message.*

Foreign Student Code A 21: *Listening to podcasts can be advantageous. There are podcasts on many topics. I am interested in music and I listen to music related broadcasts. It both improves my language proficiency and helps me learn new information.*

Foreign Student Code A 28: *Including various activities on social networking sites can be beneficial for building language proficiency. It can reach many people. And in a social sense, they can talk about current events from daily life.*

Foreign Student Code A 33: *My favourite blogs and wikis. We can get new information and update it here. There are many authors on these sites and we can edit the information. I also think that autonomy and creativity are supported, especially in blog posts.*

In Table 7, the communicative competence status of foreign students, their use of technology for communicative competence, the difficulties they encounter in communication and their views on the use of technology in the formation of their communicative competence are evaluated.

Table 7. Opinions of foreign students on the formation of communicative competences through technologies

Themes	Sub-themes	Foreign student	
		F	%
Communicative competence situations	Very good	1	2.5
	Good	8	20
	I'm undecided	4	10
	Bad	21	52.5
	Very bad	6	15
Sum		40	100
The state of using technology for communicative competence	Anytime	17	42.5
	Often	19	47.5
	Sometimes	2	5
	Rarely	1	2.5
	Never	1	2.5
Sum		40	100
Difficulties encountered in communication	Language is complex	13	32.5
	Compliance problems	12	30
	Loneliness	5	12.5
	Thoughts of doing wrong	10	25
Sum		40	100
The use of technology in the formation of communicative competences	Podcast	9	22.5
	Discussion/chat groups	5	12.5
	Instant messaging	8	20
	Blogs and wikis	7	17.5
	Social networks	11	27.5
Sum		40	100

In Table 7, the communicative competence status of the foreign students participating in the research, their use of technology for communicative competence, the difficulties they encounter in communication and their views on the use of technology in the formation of their communicative competence are evaluated. 2.5% of the foreign students stated their communicative competence as very good, 20% as good, 10% as undecided, 52.5% as bad and 15% as very bad. 42.5% of the foreign students stated that they always use technology for communicative competence, 47.5% as often, 5% as sometimes, 2.5% as rarely and 2.5% as never. 32.5% of the foreign students stated that the language is complex, 30% stated adaptation problems, 12.5% stated loneliness, 25% stated the thought of making mistakes are the difficulties they encounter in communication. 22.5% of the foreign students stated that podcasts, 12.5% discussion/chat groups, 20% instant messaging, 17.5% blogs and wikis and 27.5% social networks are effective in establishing communication competencies.

4. Discussion

In our research, the majority of students gave a bad answer to the question asked to evaluate the communicative competence status of foreign students. In the study of Gokyer (2016), which was conducted to analyse and evaluate the psychological adjustment problems of foreign students coming for education, most of the participants stated that their language proficiency was 'good' and a few participants stated that they were 'very bad'. In our research, the majority of the students frequently answered the question asked to evaluate the use of technology in order to establish the communicative competence of foreign students. In the study conducted by Cuhadar and Yucel (2010) to reveal the factors affecting the self-efficacy perceptions of foreign language teacher candidates in the use of information and communication technologies for teaching purposes, 82% of the students

stated that they found themselves sufficient in the use of information and communication technologies for teaching purposes.

In our research, the majority of students answered the question asked to determine the difficulties that foreign students encounter in communication, and the answers given include adaptation problems, loneliness and the thought of making mistakes. Furnham (2002) in his study with foreign students revealed that students experience loneliness, incompatibility and shyness. In the study of Hasırcı (2021), the majority of participants answered that they have difficulty in the questions asked by post-graduate students who learn foreign languages to evaluate their views on whether they have difficulties in understanding the lessons. Martín-Pastor, González-Gil, Río, Robaina, and Castro (2013) stated in their study that immigrant students' reading comprehension skills differ from their peers due to cultural differences.

In our research, the majority of students gave the answer to the question asked to evaluate the use of technology in the formation of communicative competences of foreign students, and the answers given included wikis, blogs and discussion/chat groups. In the study of Elgort, Smith, and Toland (2008) on the use of wikis in educational environments, it has been stated that learning environments where wikis are used as collaborative education tools have positive aspects such as effective communication, quick feedback and encouragement. Izquierdo and Reyes (2009) stated that blogs support autonomous learning in their studies with university students learning foreign languages and aiming at teaching reading strategies. Villon (2015), in his study in which he researched new teaching methods to be applied through the speaking club, stated that the club activities affect the communication skills of the students positively and that the students want to learn more while having fun.

5. Conclusion

In the century we live in, the rapid development of technology continues to add innovations to our lives, making our life easier by using the positive aspects of technology and benefiting from the advantages of technology make many contributions to our lives. It has become possible to communicate more easily by making use of technological tools such as mobile phones, tablets and computers, which enter our lives very quickly in learning languages and accessing information.

 In our study, which we conducted with the aim of revealing the opinions of foreign students in order to establish the communicative competence of foreign university students through technologies, the students' communicative competence status, their use of technology to create their communicative competence, the difficulties they encounter in communication and their views on the use of technology for the formation of communicative competences were questioned. The majority of participants gave a bad answer to the Likert-type question asked to determine the communicative competence status of the students. The majority of participants frequently answered the Likert-type question asked about determining the students' use of technology to build their communicative competence.

The participants answered the question asked about determining the difficulties students face in communication as complexity of the language, adaptation problems, loneliness and the thought of making mistakes. The majority of participants answered the question that the language is complex. The participants answered the question about determining the use of technology for the formation of students' communicative competencies as podcasts, discussion/chat groups, instant messaging, blogs and wikis and social networks. The majority of participants gave the answer to the question asked about social networks. Using technology to build communicative competence brings positive results such as reaching a large number of people simultaneously, bringing people from all levels together, accessing information outside the classroom environment and always accessing information.

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6. Recommendations

Various suggestions have been developed in line with the results obtained from the research. In order to support the communicative competences of foreign students, it is necessary to carry out activities that will ensure peer cohesion. Since one of the situations they consider in the use of technology for the formation of their auditory competencies is easy archiving and replaying, the lessons should be archived and the students should be offered the opportunity to watch them again. It is necessary to carry out studies in order to determine and control the blogs and wikis that students follow in order to build their communicative competence. In order for universities to obtain useful information in their social networks, content for foreign students should be shared. Online and face-to-face discussion/chat groups should be established in order for foreign and non-foreign university students to communicate mutually. In order to accelerate the adaptation process of foreign university students, it is necessary to plan and conduct orientation trainings frequently. It is necessary to organise activities to encourage foreign university students to build their communicative competence and to support them to take part in these activities.

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Appendix: Student semi-structured interview form

You are invited to our study to reveal the views of foreign university students on the creation of communicative competences through technologies. Participation in the research is on a voluntary basis and you will not be penalised if you refuse to participate. It is important for the reliability of the research that you answer the following questions sincerely. Thank you for your participation.

Student

Gender:

Class:

Section:

1. How would you evaluate your communicative competence? Tick the box next to the most appropriate statement from the expressions below.

Very good ( )   Good ( )   Undecided ( )   Bad ( )   Very bad ( )

2. How would you evaluate your use of technology to build your communicative competence? Tick the box next to the most appropriate statement from the expressions below.

Always ( )   Often ( )   Sometimes ( )   Rarely ( )   Never ( )

3. What are the difficulties you encounter in communication?

4. What are your suggestions for the use of technology to create communicative competences of foreign students?