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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO CURRENT CONDITION OF THE FORMATION
OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL-COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCIES IN ONLINE EDUCATIONAL FORMAT
(IN THE SAMPLE OF NON-LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITIES)**

Abstract: This article is written to determine the peculiarities of formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies of the non-linguistic university students in online education. The authors scrutinize the key aspects of professional-communicative competencies in foreign language based on the earliest investigations provided by foreign and Kazakhstani scholars and on the results of the questionnaire. Moreover, the authors emphasized the significance of online education in the formation of professional-communicative competencies in foreign languages on the basis of the monitor and report, made by National Center for Higher Education Development. However, authors claim that the challenges persist in some Kazakhstani universities, including non-linguistic ones. Despite the universities have utilized the platform to offer massive open online courses, they still face issues related to methodological and technological aspects of online education implementation. Thus, the authors demonstrate the overview on the procedure of integration of online lessons, especially, for the development of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in agrarian universities. In this regard, the research was carried out among 200 students and teaching staff of the S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University to identify the current condition of foreign language professional-communicative competencies formation in online education.

Keywords: online education, higher education, non-linguistic university, foreign language professional-communicative competencies, digitalization, massive open online courses.

Introduction

The twenty first century is the century of technological transformation and digitalization. Consequently, personal computers, mobile devices and electronic gadgets have become an indispensable part of the educational process, leading it to new format as online. Furthermore, the pandemic situation in 2019, caused by coronavirus, has revealed the importance of online education and the necessity of the methodological readiness of educational institutions to this format. In this case, the National Center for Higher Education Development conducted monitoring and compiled analytical report for 2023 on the implementation of the concept for the development of higher education in the republic of Kazakhstan for 2023 and 2029 years. This analytical report contains information on 11 targets related to the level of digital literacy of the population. It is revealed that the digital transformation in the sphere of higher education means the transformation of both the educational process itself and its organizational structures. So, digitalization is especially relevant for universities, as competition for the selection of the best students and teachers increases, and university graduates are required to be able to apply digital technologies in practice. In this context, distance learning has great potential for use in educational environment. Moreover, according to the monitoring results for 2023, distance (online) learning is available in 55 organizations of higher education, which is 54% of the total

number of civil organizations of higher education (National Center for Higher Education Development, 2023). However, despite the fact that online learning is being established in higher education of Kazakhstan, there are some challenges with the organisation of educational procedure in some universities, including non-linguistic universities.

Moreover, according to the report on the self-assessment of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs within the framework of specialized accreditation made by Independent Association of Accredited Registrars (IAAR), since 2019 the S.Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University has been using the national open education platform of Kazakhstan in order to improve the quality of students' self-education. This platform is designed to host massive open online courses (moocs.kz) to offer online lessons in basic bachelor's degree subjects studied at the university in order to ensure that students can form basic competencies. Nevertheless, according to the report, in the standard number 7, the active use of information and communication technologies by the teaching staff in the educational process (for example, online learning, electronic portfolios, massive open online courses and etc.) is considered as important factor and needs to be enhanced. Secondly, the results of the assessment within the framework of specialized accreditation by the National Accreditation and Rating Agency (NAAR) demonstrate that, technological support for students and teaching staff in accordance with the educational program (for example, online training, modeling, databases, data analysis programs) suggests improvement (S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical research University, 2019). Thus, S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University still needs some methodological guidance and strategies to the implementation of online lessons into university curriculum. Especially, online education is vital in the process of formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies of the agrarian university students, sine the agrarian sector plays a vital role in Kazakhstan's economic development. In addition, during his official visist to Italy, president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev visited the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome. During his discussion with FAO General Director Qu Dongyu, the President emphasized the significance of guaranteeing worldwide food security and advancing the sustainable development of the agro-industrial complex (Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). Consequently, the agro-industrial sector of Kazakhtsan needs specialists who are not only highly qualified in their field, but also have successfully acquired foreign-language professional communicative competencies. Thus, **the aim** of the paper to examine the current condition of formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies of non-linguistic university students in online format of education. Based on the aim, the following **objectives** are identified:

1. To determine the scientific and theoretical foundations of non-linguistic university students' foreign language professional-communicative competencies formation on the basis of foreign and Kazakhstani researchers' investigation;
2. To conduct the quantitaive and qualitative research analysis to identify the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in online learning environment;
3. To analyze the results of the questionnaire and interview and assess the current state of formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in the conditions of online education.

Research methodology and methods

The paper conducts a theoretical analysis of the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in online conditions, drawing on the research results of both foreign and local scientists. Moreover, it identifies the peculiarities of online

formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University by administering both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

To comprehend the perspectives of both teachers and students regarding the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in online learning environment, a survey was conducted. The survey was believed to be the quantitative method of investigation. The study involved 200 participants, comprising students and teachers from Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University. During the research, participants were presented with multiple-choice questions concerning the role of online education and the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in online learning conditions. Participants were provided with a link to the survey on Google Forms and were encouraged to respond anonymously. They were made aware of the aim of the questionnaire and encouraged to express their viewpoints freely, ensuring that their responses would not be criticized.

The aim of the survey was to determine the current state of formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies by analyzing opinions and experiences of students and teaching staff. Moreover, the questionnaire involves identifying key problematic aspects of integrating online learning into the process of foreign language professional-communicative competence formation.

Furthermore, to comprehend deeper view of the teachers and students on the given issue the interview was conducted as the qualitative research methodology. As the survey was organized on the basis of multiple choice questions, which cannot obviously provide the whole picture of the issue, the aim of the interview was to gain in-depth understanding of the problem and to provide the best possible solution by analyzing the participants' own experience. The interview was consisted of open-ended and wh-questions, which enabled the participants to express their feelings, thoughts and challenges that they face. Thematic analysis was implemented to examine the verbatim transcriptions of the qualitative data from the interview. In addition, in order to explore the research questions, repeated themes, ideas and patterns that found in the interview transcript were categorized. As the result of this, data's validity and reliability were increased, which could significantly improve the quality of the research findings. The total number of the interview questions was eight. The interviewees were asked to give a permission to record their voice during the interview and asked to feel free to express their thoughts. Here are some questions of the interview:

What is the significance of the formation of foreign-language professional communicative competencies of the students?

How can online courses help students to enhance their professional communicative competencies in foreign language?

What are some reasons of integration of online education in foreign language teaching procedure?

What difficulties do students encounter when learning a foreign language in an online classroom, especially in situations involving professional communication?

Literature review

The research into the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies has been undertaken by both, foreign and Kazakhstani scientists. Scholars from both groups have made a profound contribution into the the investigation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies formation in the current condition of globalization. Moreover, representatives of the both group claim that the competencies acquired by students have a significant impact on the effective construction of their future careers, as well as on the establishment of strong partnerships with stakeholders.

The issue of the foreign language professional-communicative competencies has been the subject of research investigations of various scholars, including E. P. Abdurazyakova, Hymes, M. Canale, M. Celce-Murcia, L. Bachman, A. Palmer, S.S. Kunanbayeva, A.T. Chaklikova, K.K. Duisekova, T.V. Mikhailova, and Zh. T. Zhylytyrova.

T.V. Mikhailova, K.K. Duisekova, F. Orazakynkyzy, G. Z. Beysembaeva and S. Issabekova (2021) underlined the significance of foreign language professional-communicative competencies and reckoned that in any professional field there is an urgent need to establish business ties with colleagues from different countries. Furthermore, the successful formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies contribute to the ascent to a higher professional level, allowing students to develop ideas that are in tune with global experience. In addition, such competencies provide an opportunity to present their concepts in the context of foreign market.

According to M. Canale (1980), the study of various points of view on professional communicative competence defines it as “the ability and willingness to participate in foreign language communication in accordance with requirements. These requirements, in turn, are based on a range of language knowledge and competencies covering language mechanisms, speech production, grammatical proficiency, lexical knowledge (taking into account socio-cultural aspect), spelling, pronunciation skills, listening skills, the ability to comprehend the utterance in complex language situations.

According to E.P. Abdurazakova (2010), foreign language professional-communicative competence refers to the exact degree of mastery of communication techniques, including an understanding of communication standards, norms of behavior and educational achievements. This concept means the ability of a specialist to function as a secondary linguistic personality in various socially determined contexts, demonstrating readiness for intercultural and professional exchange. It is appropriate to emphasize that in recent decades there has been an increased interest of scientists in studying the complexities of foreign language communicative competence and clarifying its constituent elements.

Furthermore, scholars, based on their study, provided their own definitions of foreign language communicative competencies. The definitions were given below, on the Table 1:

Table 1

Scholars' investigations into foreign language communicative competencies

No	Scientist	Provided definition
1	D. Naurzalina (2015)	systematically identifies and characterizes individuals stages of the formation of professional foreign language competence, distinguishing categories ranging from basic foreign language literacy to functional literacy, progressing further to encompass professional literacy, foreign language professional education, and culminating in the attainment of comprehensive professional foreign language competence.
2	O.V. Kudryashova (2007)	suggests three components of professional foreign language competence: regulatory, cognitive and communicative.
3	J.O.Greene (2016)	emphasizes that readiness for communication in foreign languages is achieved by combining professional knowledge, language competence and a socio-behavioral factor. The formation of the professional foreign language competence is carried out on the basis of the unity of the subject of activity and focus on solving professionally significant tasks.

4	A.T. Chaklikova (2012)	the foreign language professional communicative competence of future bachelors and masters is a separate psychological construct formed on the basis of the integration of the disciplines of the subject block, fundamental and adaptable components of the professional curriculum and enhanced by specialized courses on research and professional orientation in the process of in-depth foreign language teaching. This construct, characterized by the independence of communicative and professional elements, includes cognitive and behavioral aspects, as well as a stable willingness and ability to engage in professional and research activities in a foreign language.
5	D. Hymes (1972)	he generalized this concept as the ability to choose appropriate grammatical means in various communicative situations. In his subsequent research, he identified linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic components of foreign language communicative competence. Hymes proposes a model of communicative competence for analyzing communicative events in a sociocultural and professional context.
6	R.A.Valeeva, O.V. Baykova, and A.K.Kusainov (2016)	the approach centered around competency suggests that learners not only acquire knowledge but also cultivate problem-solving skills. Thus, when employing technologies to improve professional communicative competence in a foreign language, the focus is on practical experiences, nurturing the student's capability to take initiative and address professional challenges.

As it can be seen from the Table 1, various investigations were conducted to provide accurate definition to the term “professional communicative competence in foreign language”. Analyzing and summarizing all the studies, the final interpretation to the term “professional communicative competence in foreign language” has been suggested by authors:

The term “professional communicative competence in foreign language” refers to the complex of competencies, including linguistic, discourse and soci-cultural aspects of linguistic personality, which can support students to build successful connections with the foreign language speakers in different life situations, including business and trade. In this the knowledge of language itself is not enough, so graduates are asked to acquire professional aspects of the language curricula to build strong partnership in global economics.

Furthermore, Malaysian researchers Maisarah Ahmad Kamil and Ahmad Mazli Muhammad (2021) made an investigation into professional-communicative competence in English for occupational purposes (EOP) courses, and suggested a systematic literature review and proposal of a framework. The literature for this systematic review was gathered from the online databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science and ScienceDirect. A total number of initially retrieved and evaluated articles was 159. However, following the application of quality criteria to exclude irrelevant papers, 133 articles deemed relevant to the topic and were included in the systematic review. As the result of the review, it is identified that, the communicative competence consists of productive skills: speaking and writing.

Authors’ investigation results were given on the Table 2, as the list of common speaking and writing communicative tasks:

Table 2
Common speaking and writing communicative tasks

№	Common speaking communicative tasks:	Common writing communicative tasks:
1	Giving oral presentations	Writing emails
2	Providing speech at the meetings and seminars	Writing reports
3	Communicating with customers and clients	Writing business letters
4	Handling telephone calls	Writing proposals
5	Giving and receiving instructions	Writing memos
6	Participating in social conversations	Preparing texts to the presentation slides

As it is demonstrated on the Table 2, common speaking communicative tasks for the effective formation of professional communicative competence in English language, are linked with discussion, persuasion, convincing and negotiating abilities in professional sphere (Belwal, R., Priyadarshi, P., & Al Fazari, M. H., 2017). Whereas, common writing communicative tasks for future specialists should be based on writing emails, responds ti the business letters and proposals, and preparing texts to the presentation slides (Ahmmed, R., Sinha, B. S., Khan, R., & Islam, D. M., 2020).

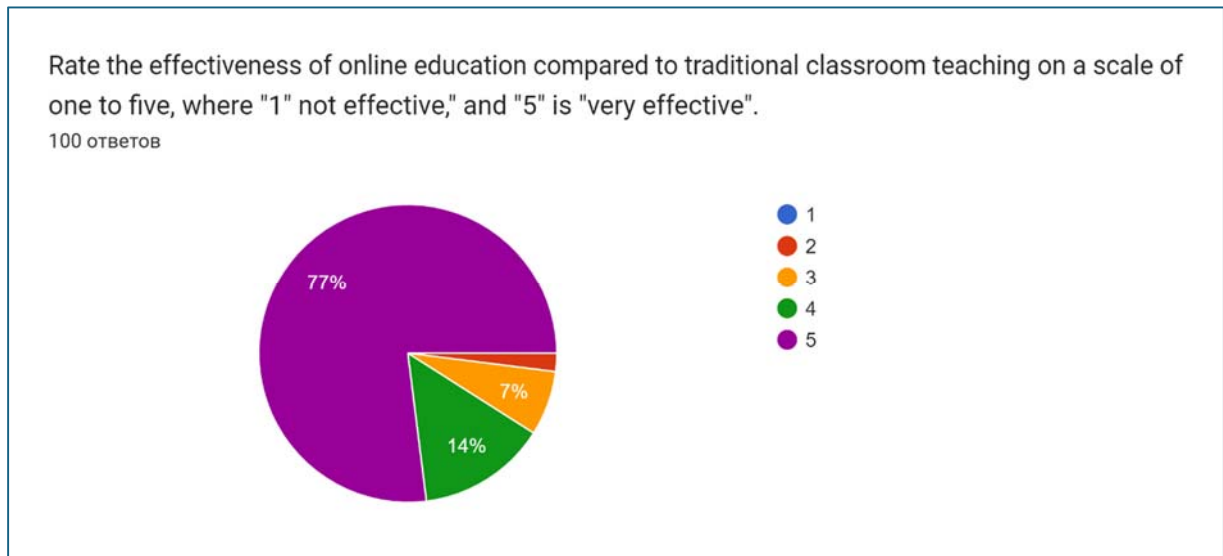
Also, Al Mamun and other scientists underlined the importance of online tools in the formation of students' foreign language professional-communicative competencies and reckoned that one of the most significant uses of educational technology is the online classroom, which comes in three styles: synchronous, asynchronous and blended. E-learning platforms for Agrarian sector will provide virtual tours, 360 degree pictures and online laborotories, which could effectively be integrated to the learning procedure (Al Mamun, M. A., Lawrie, G., & Wright, T., 2020).

Results and discussion

As a result of the conducted survey, it was revealed that 48% of respondents “totally agree” that the students' proficiency level in a foreign language can affect their career in the agricultural sector. Moreover, 35% of parrticipants chose the answer “almost agree” with that opinion, while 15% of the respondents picked the option “neutral”. This indicates that most students understand the value of learning foreign language for their future employment in the agriculture industry. It emphasizes how important it is for students to develop their competencies in foreign language in order to become more globally competetive and prepared for the workforce. Still, a percentage of students might require additional education or experience to completely understand the significance of language proficiency for their future careers. This data can aid educators and legislators emphasize how significant it is for students to acquire foreign language skills as a part of agriculture education program. Furthermore, to the question: how often do you use online resources to learn professional oriented English? Students choose the following answers: “everyday”- 17%, “several times a week”-45%, “once a week”-12%, “rarely”-25% and only 1% of respondents chose the option “never”. From this answer it is revealed that, the majority of students use internet resources often, suggesting that learning professional-oriented English heavily relies on these resources. But a sizable minority only utilize them little or never, indicating possible obstacles or a need for more encouragement and assistance to the effective integration of online tools to the teaching and learning process. Then, students were asked to rate the effectiveness of online education compared to traditional classroom teaching on a scale of one to five, where "1" was indicated as "not effective," and "5" was considered "very effective". The results of the survey question is demonstrated below

Figure 1

The survey results



As it is illustrated on the Figure 1, most of the participants (77%) rated the effectiveness of online education as “very effective”, which demonstrates that the large amount of the students have a strong belief in the effectiveness of online education. This favorable opinion might be explained by the adaptability, accessibility, and variety of learning materials that online education provides, which can accommodate different schedules and learning preferences.

Moreover, students and teachers were asked to list some obstacles encountered while undergoing professional-oriented English lessons, from the perspectives of Agrarian university. As the result of the questionnaire, it is identified that the majority of respondents (45%) reckon that there is an absence of specialized and professional-oriented books and teaching aids on the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in online education. In addition, the other barriers were investigated as follows:

- A) "Lack of study hours for learning a language due to major-oriented disciplines"-27%
- B) "Lack of competency-oriented focus in language education"-18%
- C) "Absence of online preparation"-10%

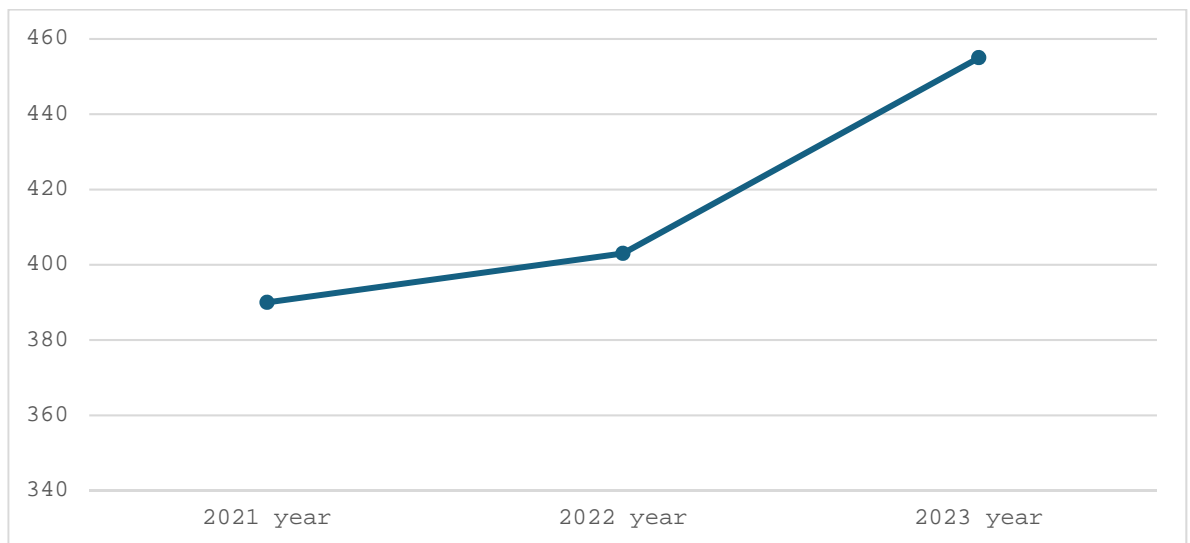
These results underline the necessity of more focused materials and systematic modifications to facilitate successful language acquisition in professional oriented context under the conditions of online learning.

The next question was organised to identify the respondents' viewpoint towards the current level of training of students of an agrotechnical university in terms of foreign language professional-communicative competence. Here, almost half of the survey participants (49%) chose the option “satisfactory”, while 22% of the respondents chose the variant “insufficient”. In addition, 19% of the survey participants asserted that the current level of training for students at an agrotechnical university in terms of foreign language professional-communicative competence is “good”. And only 7% of participants reckoned that the current condition of formation of foreign-language professional-communicative competencies is “perfect”. Also, there was a question about the advantages that the respondents see in the online teaching of professionally oriented English. The answers were accepted as following:

- a) Flexibility and accessibility-33%
- b) International experience and partnership-19%
- c) Effective usage of resources-18%
- d) Specialised content-15%
- e) Interactive tools-15%

Furthermore, based on data provided by the National Center for the Development of Higher Education, the reported Internet speed in higher and postgraduate education institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan ranges from 40 Mbit/s to 3,400 Mbit/s, with an average speed of 455 Mbit/s. The data is given below (Figure 2):

Figure 2
Average Internet speed



As it is demonstrated above (Figure 2), average internet speed in Kazakhstan was almost 390 Mbit/s in 2021, and it experienced a small rise to approximately 405 Mbit/s in 2022. In addition, the speed of the internet reached to 455 Mbit/s in 2023, demonstrating the progress.

Moreover, as the result of the conducted interview the following qualitative data was revealed:

First of all, participants highlighted the issues related to the formation of foreign-language professional communicative competencies under the conditions of online education based on the Agrotechnical university students' and professors' perspectives:

- a) Limited teaching hours- the discipline "Professional English" goes only twice a week among the 2nd year students of the "Microbiology and biotechnology" department.
- b) Some of the students still have troubles with the Internet connection, both teaching staff and students reckoned that some of the students couldn't join the online classes.
- c) Coursebook and other study materials are not designed for online format- the exercises and study materials are not flexible to the online format, thus there is a high demand for a new adaptable coursebook for the formation of professional-communicative competencies in foreign language for Agrarian field.

Taking into consideration the problems, this paper suggests to:

Provide extra teaching hours or if it is not possible, then to suggest optional classes for the students to cover the gaps and to develop their competencies.

Ask the government to provide full access to the Internet and guarantee its quality.

Develop a new coursebook titled as “Professional English for non-linguistic university students” in L.N.Gumilyov Eurasian National University under the guidance of the professor K.K. Duisekova.

Conclusions

To sum up, globalization led to the integration of countries' economy, business and education spheres connecting the ties between them. This has led to the question of the necessity to form graduates' foreign language professional-communicative competencies for effective communication with international partners in any sphere. The ability of citizens to plan professional activities on the basis of international cooperation and dialog, as well as independence and resourcefulness are directly related to the success of their professional activities. Consequently, professional prosperity of graduates is significantly linked with the foreign language professional-communicative competencies that they acquire at the university. Thus, Kazakhstani higher-education institutions, including non-linguistic universities are asked to prepare the methodological aspect of their curricula to the upcoming requirements. Furthermore, these days digitalization and technological transformation in education system of each country lead to the demand for online learning format. In this case, the authors scrutinized the key aspects of professional-communicative competencies in foreign language based on the earliest investigations provided by foreign scholars, such as M. Canale, E.P. Abdurazakova, D. Naurzalina, O.V. Kudryashova, J.O.Greene, D. Hymes, R.A.Valeeva, O.V. Baykova, and A.K.Kusainov and Kazakhstani scholars, including S.S. Kunanbayeva, A.T. Chaklikova, K.K. Duisekova, T.V. Mikhailova, and Zh. T. Zhylytyrova. In addition, the authors emphasized the significance of online education in the formation of professional-communicative competencies in foreign languages on the basis of the monitor and report on the implementation of the concept for higher education and science between 2023 and 2029, made by National Center for Higher Education Development. As the center highlighted that the digital transformation is crucial for universities amidst increased competition, these days distance (online) learning is being adopted by 54% of higher education organizations. All in all, the authors demonstrate the overview on the procedure of integration of online lessons, especially, for the development of foreign language professional-communicative competencies in agrarian universities. In this regard, the research was carried out among 200 students and teaching staff of the S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University to identify the current condition of foreign language professional-communicative competencies formation in online education. Based on the conducted survey, several key findings have emerged:

Nearly half of the respondents (48%) strongly agree that proficiency in a foreign language significantly influences students' career prospects in the agricultural sector.

A substantial percentage of students actively utilizes online resources for studying professionally oriented English, with 45% engaging several times a week. In addition, the majority (62%) leans towards regular usage, highlighting the significance of online tools in formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies.

Participants of the survey generally rate online education as efficient, with flexibility and accessibility being the most acknowledged advantage (33%). Also, other positive aspects were identified as international experience and partnership (19%), effective resource utilization (18%), and specialized content (15%).

Several obstacles in foreign language professional-communicative competencies formation were identified: the lack of specialized books and teaching aids (45%), limited study hours due to major-oriented disciplines (27%) and a deficiency in competency-oriented focus (18%).

Perspectives on the current level of formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies at the S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University varied: 49 % of respondents found it satisfactory, 22% of participants considered it insufficient and 19% of students rated it as good. Only 7% reckoned that the condition is “perfect”.

In conclusion, as the result of the quantitative analysis, it is revealed that the integration of online learning into the formation of foreign language professional-communicative competencies has a positive view among the students and teaching staff. Moreover, the findings provide vital insights for enhancing language education programs at non-linguistic universities, including S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical Research University.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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