

¹Ainash Igembekova, ²Aigerim Almatova*, ³Mamat Khaydarov

¹*Buketov Karaganda National Research University*

²*Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University*

³*Nizami Uzbekistan National Pedagogical University*

THE EVOLUTION OF STUDENT FEEDBACK LITERACY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SCOPING REVIEW (2005 - 2025)

Abstract. Feedback literacy is becoming acknowledged as a "foundational capability" students need to self-regulate learning and improve performance at university. This scoping review charts developments in feedback literacy between 2005 and 2025 in terms of conceptualisation, pedagogical interventions, measurement and student-related factors, as well as mediators of feedback literacy related to digital technology use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts. We followed PRISMA-ScR guidelines for scoping reviews to search for, select, and screen peer-reviewed empirical studies and conceptual articles published in Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC databases. Thematic analysis was used to synthesise evidence from 43 studies resulting from this search process. The feedback literature is undergoing an ontological paradigm shift, from transmission- to connection-based views of feedback processes. Pedagogical interventions to support students' development of feedback literacy are focused on evaluative judgement through peer- and self-assessment practices and feedforward through curriculum-long approaches to feedback. As learning analytics and Generative AI gain momentum in education, students need critical «AI feedback literacy» to assess machine-generated messages. Students' development of feedback literacy is also contingent on teacher feedback literacy and relational trust. Recommendations for future research include measuring feedback literacy behaviorally and using research designs that triangulate self-report with digital log files when testing students' uptake of feedback.

Keywords: feedback literacy, scoping review, higher education, formative assessment, feedback interventions.

Introduction

In recent years, higher education systems worldwide have increasingly emphasized the role of feedback in enhancing student learning, self-regulation, and academic performance. Feedback in higher education relies on the formative assessment principles and actions that students take after receiving comments. Feedback was conceptualized by Hattie and Timperley (2007) and Boud and Molloy (2013) as part of a learning cycle wherein the instructor provides information about how good the work is, and learners interpret that information into what they will do next to improve. Carless and Boud (2018) later coined the term student feedback literacy, which they described as students' ability to value feedback, make judgements about quality, manage affect, and act on feedback to enhance future work.

Scholars connect feedback literacy with a learner's evaluative judgement or ability to make an informed judgement about the quality of work using criteria, exemplars, and the standards they should meet. Sutton (2012) provided one of the first perspectives on feedback literacy through the lens of reading and acting on comments. Nieminen and Carless (2023) provided a more nuanced discussion on how context and learning relationships impact learners' interpretation of feedback. Current publications are building on pedagogical interventions to promote feedback literacy, including training students in peer review, engaging in self-assessment and reflection activities, dialoguing criteria, and creating online feedback spaces.

Another body of work is focused on creating measurement tools and identifying behaviors associated with feedback literacy. These instruments allow researchers and instructors to measure whether interventions can affect change.

This scoping review synthesizes peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2005-2025 on feedback literacy in higher education. This review includes journal articles specific to EFL programs, as well as scholarship in the broader university context that can be applied to EFL by studying writing assignments and engaging with content area texts. This review illustrates how these works have mapped out conceptual understanding, intervention techniques, measurement tool creation, and methodological approaches.

In more detail, this literature review will be exploring three research questions:

RQ1: How has student feedback literacy been conceptualized, supported through pedagogical interventions, and measured in the current research?

RQ2: What role do the affordances of emerging digital ecologies, learning analytics, and generative AI play in mediating feedback literacy formation and practices?

RQ3: In what ways have feedback literacy practices been enacted in EFL contexts?

Methodology

This study was based on a scoping review design. This design is appropriate for mapping concepts, research approaches, and intervention types concerning feedback literacy at universities as well as for identifying research gaps. The study was conducted in accordance with the reporting standard Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR), and its design integrated and adjusted the search, selection, and synthesis steps to reflect the reporting elements of this standard.

The authors set up an a priori protocol before the selection began. It outlines the purpose, research questions, selection criteria, sources of data, search strings, screening, data extraction tools, and analysis plans.

Sources of Data and Search Strategy Data

The authors searched for tools, including Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. The range is restricted to the years 2005-2025. The authors defined a primary search string to include Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC and adjusted its own syntax to suit each of the database's requirements. We searched from 1-30 December 2025, with each search replicated by two authors to capture all relevant articles and avoid selection bias. Table 1 lists the finalized database-specific Boolean search strings.

Table 1.
Boolean Search Strings

Database	Search Query String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY("feedback literacy" OR "student feedback literacy" OR "learner feedback literacy" OR "academic feedback literacy" OR "feedback engagement" OR "feedback uptake") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("higher education" OR university OR "tertiary education") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(EFL OR "English as a foreign language" OR "second language writing" OR "academic writing") AND PUBYEAR > 2004 AND PUBYEAR < 2026
Web of Science	TS=("feedback literacy" OR "student feedback literacy" OR "learner feedback literacy" OR "academic feedback literacy" OR "feedback engagement" OR "feedback uptake") AND TS=("higher education" OR university OR "tertiary education") AND TS=(EFL OR "English as a foreign language" OR "second language writing" OR "academic writing") Timespan: 2005 to 2025 Indexes: SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI
ERIC	AB("feedback literacy" OR "student feedback literacy" OR "learner feedback literacy" OR "academic feedback literacy" OR "feedback engagement" OR

"feedback uptake") OR TI("feedback literacy" OR "student feedback literacy" OR "learner feedback literacy" OR "academic feedback literacy" OR "feedback engagement" OR "feedback uptake")
AND AB("higher education" OR university OR "tertiary education") OR
TI("higher education" OR university OR "tertiary education")
AND AB(EFL OR "English as a foreign language" OR "second language
writing" OR "academic writing") OR TI(EFL OR "English as a foreign
language" OR "second language writing" OR "academic writing")
Publication Date: January 2005 to December 2025

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The authors included peer-reviewed journal articles published in English or Russian that focused on feedback literacy in higher education. The inclusion criteria were as follows: empirical studies on interventions, works on the development and validation of measurement instruments themselves, and conceptual papers of literature focused on describing the conceptual model, providing an operational definition of feedback literacy, or describing feedback literacy as a construct. The review comprised general university-level studies, as well as EFL-based studies in the context of general university education and studies involving EFL, where the assignments included academic writing, disciplinary genres, or tasks involving detailed feedback to students. The authors excluded publications on school education, conference proceedings, dissertations, books, book chapters, and reports. Studies without access to the full text were excluded. We excluded articles in which the term “feedback literacy” was missing and those in which the authors did not connect results to feedback literacy through a definition, model, or measurement tool.

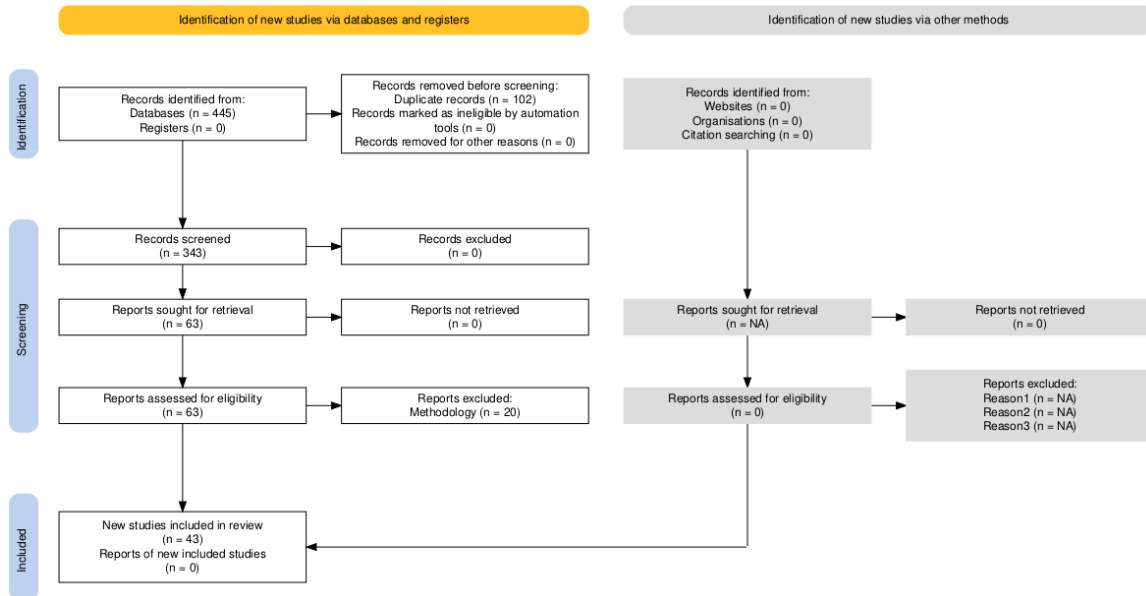
Selection of Studies

PRISMA guidelines were applied to the study selection process for transparency and replicability purposes. Searching databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC) generated 445 records, of which 102 duplicates were removed using automated and manual duplication checks. The remaining 343 records were imported into Covidence™, where title and abstract screening were conducted independently. At this stage, 280 publications were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. After removing duplicates, 63 publications were subjected to full-text assessment. Of these, 20 did not meet the requirements specific to the review regarding methodology or thematic focus and were excluded. In total, 43 studies met all the requirements for inclusion and were used in the final qualitative synthesis of this scoping review. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram for the search and selection processes of this study (Haddaway et al., 2022).

Data extraction and analysis

A data extraction form and codebook were developed by the authors. A subset of articles was used to pilot the form and identify categories to strengthen definitions. Descriptive and thematic analyses were conducted. Thematic analysis divided interventions into four categories and defined the differences between the EFL sub-corpus and the overall higher education corpus.

Figure 1.
PRISMA flow diagram.



Results

A total of 43 studies were included in the final analysis. Publications span the period from 2005 to 2025, reflecting the gradual evolution of feedback literacy from early conceptual foundations to recent empirical and technology-enhanced applications. The majority of studies were published after 2018, indicating growing scholarly attention to feedback literacy in higher education. Most articles appeared in high-impact journals, such as *assessment and evaluation in higher education*, *higher education*, *teaching in higher education*, and *innovations in education and teaching internationally*, highlighting the academic significance of the field.

Models and Levels of Analysis Underpinning Feedback Literacy Constructs

Within the corpus, early works describe a paradigmatic shift from thinking about feedback as a message provided by the teacher to reconceptualizing feedback as an activity of learning in which students interpret criteria, judge quality, and make plans to act on feedback. Hattie and Timperley (2007) associated the impact of feedback with the goals and level of instructional regulation embedded within assignments. Sutton (2012) posits feedback literacy as the ability to make sense of comments and act upon their meanings. Building on theoretical conceptions of feedback literacy, Boud and Molloy (2013) reframe feedback models to associate feedback utility with assessment design and the locus of responsibility. Carless and Boud (2018) developed a model of student feedback literacy and defined its components, including valuing feedback, making evaluative judgements, managing affect, and taking action. By advancing a learning-centered conception of feedback literacy, Molloy et al. (2020) connects feedback to instructional designs that promote deliberate practice.

Contributions within the corpus have extended these models and advanced new perspectives. Chong (2021) presents an ecological perspective of feedback literacy, delineating how environmental resources contribute to its development. Gravett (2022) articulates a sociomaterial perspective by associating feedback practices with artifacts, interfaces, and spaces. Nieminen and Carless (2023) critically reviewed feedback literacy and cautioned against simplifying the construct to an individual capability without considering context and connection. Gravett and Carless (2024) delineated feedback literacy-as-event to associate specific instances of feedback with tasks, relationships, and other course conditions. Building on the idea of situatedness, Carless (2025) offers the concept of academic feedback literacy to bridge the gap between how students engage with feedback and academic genres and expectations.

Studies in this area increasingly shift their unit of analysis to the educator and the co-design of feedback. Deneen and Hoo (2023) connect teacher and student assessment literacies and illustrate how the coordination of criteria and teacher expectations lays the groundwork for productive interactions. Chan and Luo (2022) described how teachers' personal conceptions of "giving" feedback align with specific assessment formats. Drawing forward the idea of teacher feedback literacy, Boud and Dawson (2023) propose a theoretical framework for "feedback literate teachers" that connects teachers' professional capabilities to students' capacity to develop feedback literacy. Heron et al. (2023) connects teacher feedback literacy to "relationality," associating effective feedback with trusting relationships. Continuing this line of research, Heron et al. (2024) employed an observational lens and studied feedback via an analysis of live classroom interactions. Matthews et al. (2024) describes learning partnerships between teachers and students and connects feedback literacy to the co-development of "ground rules" for feedback. Nicola-Richmond et al. (2023) delineate feedback literacy in the workplace and examine how learners experience feedback in ways that matter to identity and professional learning.

Feedback-related interventions and instructional designs aimed at actions after feedback

Peer feedback and peer assessment interventions comprise the largest group of interventions through which evaluative judgement is developed. Winstone et al. (2019) reported how feedback literacy is scaffolded by particular pedagogical conditions, such as requirements to respond to others' comments and expectations to apply feedback to new work. Fernández-Toro and Duensing (2021) demonstrated that reciprocal assessment fosters criterion mastery and reasoned evaluative judgement. Hoo et al. (2022) link self- and peer-assessment activities to increase student ownership of work quality and subsequent revisions. Hoo, Deneen, and Boud (2022) reviewed this body of intervention with a particular focus on criteria, exemplars, and reflection. Man et al. (2024) revealed that targeted peer-review training directly improves comment quality and text revisions. Ultimately, Zhu and Evans (2024) clarified the mechanism behind these successes, illustrating that active engagement with criteria is a fundamental prerequisite for developing robust evaluative judgement.

Interventions related to self-assessment, reflection, and feedback-seeking behaviors are also prominent in the corpus. Ducasse and Hill (2019) described how feedback comments in university writing tasks are complemented by educational technology and reflection activities. Malecka et al. (2022) traced the behavioral trajectory of students and analyzed the progression from initially requesting feedback to implementing final text revisions. Viewing this phenomenon through the lens of reflective literacy, Carless and Young (2023) argue that strategic feedback-seeking indicates the adoption of a highly proactive learner stance. This active engagement yields measurable benefits. Hey-Cunningham et al. (2021) established a strong correlation between students' deep interactions with comments and the improved quality of subsequent drafts. To expand this scope beyond the university, Nicola-Richmond et al. (2023) projected these skills into the professional sphere, asserting that modern workplace expectations demand a high level of feedback literacy from graduates.

Feedforward interventions and instructional designs embedded in programs link learning from feedback to future assignments and long-term learning. Noon and Eyre (2020) illustrated how analyzing common feedback behaviors can generate actionable recommendations for upcoming tasks. This process is deeply interpersonal. Hill et al. (2021) conceptualize "relational feedforward," noting that its effectiveness relies heavily on aligned teacher-learner expectations and a mutual understanding of future steps. At the structural level, de Kleijn (2023) advocates integrating feedback literacy directly into instructional design by proposing a longitudinal learning sequence that spans an entire course. To explore the empirical impact of such approaches, Little et al. (2024) evaluated the teachability of these skills by examining how pedagogical interventions inform broader program-design decisions and metric selection.

To track this developmental progress over time, Carless and Young (2023) introduced an analytical model that followed a student's feedback uptake across multiple draft versions and assignments. Complementing this structural research, Matthews et al. (2024) demonstrated that a partnership approach to co-designing feedback activities significantly enhanced student agency.

Digital and data-driven feedback formats

Articles on this theme describe the emergence of digital formats that change the temporality, modality, and visibility of student review practices. Ma et al. (2021) discussed feedback in online assessment, connecting digital assessment practices to feedback literacy enactment through actions such as reviewing criteria, responding to comments, and implementing feedback into revisions. Wood (2021) characterizes dialogic feedback that is mediated by technology, interpreting the student–teacher conversation that occurs within a digital space in which student responses make the criteria meaningful and negotiate the next steps. Jin et al. (2024) provides an account of a scaffolding feedback literacy tool implemented within learning analytics research, tying digital support to improve student feedback enactment. Gravett (2022) and Gravett and Carless (2024) linked digital feedback formats to sociomaterial and consequential views of feedback literacy, where interfaces and digital artifacts inform students' decision-making about revisions.

The articles within this digital strand also connect feedback literacy to data-reading practices and automatically generate feedback. Weidlich et al. (2025) report on learning analytics feedback by describing how analytics reports influence approaches to feedback practice within higher education. Tepgec et al. (2025) proposed learning analytics-informed feedback literacy by connecting feedback literacy development to the ability to read data on learning activities. Liu and Deris (2025) proposed the concept of AI feedback literacy by specifying the abilities necessary to critically read automated comments and determine the limits of artificial intelligence feedback. Nieminen (2023) and Carless (2025) situated reading digital outputs within context, relationships, and disciplinary conventions, highlighting how automated feedback is contingent on students' understanding of genre expectations.

Feedback Literacy Measurement Studies and Solutions

Measurement papers have established methods for quantifying feedback literacy relations. Zhan (2022) reported on the validation of a feedback literacy scale, advanced the measurement instrument, and tested its psychometric qualities. Song (2022) introduced a model for feedback literacy measurement and investigated the structure of the construct at the factor level. The results support the comparability of self-report indicators across studies. Dawson et al. (2024) present the feedback literacy behavior scale, which anchors measurement in student behaviors enacted after receiving comments.

Feedback literacy measurement practices connect feedback literacy to related assessment constructs and feedback transfer models. Zhu and Evans (2024) associated assessment literacy development with activity structures that support engagement with criteria and evaluative judgement, providing a framework for understanding the outcomes of peer- and self-assessment learning activities. Carless and Young (2025) offer a model of feedback uptake that develops an analytic framework fit for triangulating questionnaire data with observations of behaviors enacted in comments and drafts of student texts. Little et al. (2024) relate the measurement of feedback literacy gains to indicator selection and the duration of pedagogical intervention.

The methodological profiles of papers in this corpus draw upon conceptual papers, qualitative studies, mixed-methods research, quasi-experimental learning activity designs, and the psychometric validation of quantitative measures. Arksey and O'Malley (2005) offer a scoping review method through which this study was mapped. Qualitative and observational studies by Heron et al. (2023) and Heron et al. (2024) connects feedback literacy measurements

to classroom interactions. Finally, the conceptual contributions from Chong (2021), Gravett (2022), Nieminen and Carless (2023), and Gravett and Carless (2024) increase the sophistication with which context is treated in the analysis of the results. The instructional models designed by de Kleijn (2023) Carless and Young (2023) provide a means of considering feedback transfer longitudinally.

Discussion

Themes provide an account of how feedback literacy has been formed into a research program over time. Conceptually, publications have supplied language to discuss student agency (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and framed contexts (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy et al., 2020; Sutton, 2012). Contributions have described feedback literacy as when students decode criteria (assign meanings to comments) and act accordingly. This work was extended by Chong (2021), Gravett (2022), Nieminen and Carless (2022), Gravett and Carless (2024), and Carless (2025), who applied an ecological, sociomaterial, event-based, and academic lens to feedback literacy research and demonstrated how feedback literacy is mediated by relationships with teachers, peers, and disciplinary genres when students make decisions about revisions.

Intervention work has made visible how feedback literacy develops only when whole courses are programmed with learning activities designed to promote student feedback. Peer- and self-assessment interventions guide students to develop evaluative judgement by providing opportunities to engage with criteria and examples over time; Winstone et al. (2019), Fernández-Toro and Duensing (2021), Hoo et al. (2022), and Zhu and Evans (2024) each unpack this logic. Training students to peer review their EFL writing (Man et al., 2024) and provide feedback for others' academic writing (Hey-Cunningham et al., 2021) explicates the connection between feedback literacy and disciplinary writing expertise. Studies eliciting and enacting feedback (Malecka et al., 2022) and feedback-seeking behaviors (Carless & Young, 2025) show a connection between student agency and translating comments into revisions. Finally, the feedforward design (Noon & Eyre, 2020), relational feedforward (Hill et al., 2021), and longitudinal curriculum models (de Kleijn, 2023) provide examples of how course programming enables students to learn how to take feedback into the next assignment.

Regarding RQ3, feedback literacy practices in EFL contexts and writing courses seem to be enacted mostly through cycles of drafting and peer review activities. Students learning English as a foreign language face the dual task of attending to surface-level language issues and grappling with complicated academic genres that might be new to them (Carless, 2025). Against this backdrop, teacher intervention plays an important role. Teaching students how to peer-review their peers' writing in language classrooms can help learners do more than correct surface errors, as well as prepare students to interpret language requirements with intention, which has been shown to have a direct impact on students' own review comments as well as revised drafts (Man et al., 2024). Pairing writing activities with digital tools and reflection activities can also allow English learners to move beyond seeing teacher feedback on grammar as one-way street (Ducasse & Hill, 2019). In other words, when students engage in dialogue with teachers and peers about their writing over time, there is evidence of development through drafts (Hey-Cunningham et al., 2021). Therefore, feedback literacy skills may serve to connect students to the language learning context, as well as to the broader academic community.

Feedback literacy in digital publications operationalizes the necessary conditions during the shift to online assessment and learning analytics platforms. Ma et al. (2021) Wood (2021) connects digital formats to conversations and the spirit of revising. Jin et al. (2024) pair analytics with scaffolding to describe processes that digitally enable students to enact feedback. Weidlich et al. (2025) and Tepgec et al. (2025) Connect learning analytics to interpreting data and student feedback practices. Liu and Deris (2025) coins AI feedback literacy and attends to why students need to critically read automated prompts. Nieminen, Carless, (2023) and Carless

(2025) both conceptually argue that interpreting data and analytics requires attention to context, relationality, and academic genres, because machine-based feedback can only produce recommendations based on written assumptions of text quality and encoded criteria.

Feedback literacy is measurable when reading these articles. The measures produced by Zhan (2022) and Song (2022) enable self-report assessment of different facets of feedback literacy. In contrast, the behavioral scale proposed by Dawson et al. (2024) and Carless and Young's (2025) model of feedback takes anchor measurement in students' actions after receiving comments and taking feedback forward to new drafts. Little et al. (2024) connected evidence of feedback literacy's plasticity to the length of interventions and choice of measured indicators; this conclusion should motivate more robust applications in the next wave of scholarship.

This collection of articles delineates the areas of inquiry that can be tested with EFL learners in higher education. Collecting versions of student writing and log files from digital platforms would make it possible to triangulate self-reported data with revision behaviors, as suggested by Jin et al. (2024). However, any initiative should also measure faculty engagement with feedback literacy activities based on Deneen and Hoo (2023), Chan and Luo (2022), Boud and Dawson (2023), Heron et al. (2023, 2024), and Matthews et al.'s (2024) partnership measurements. This recommendation stems from the recognition that students cannot develop feedback literacy if the criteria are not aligned, trust is lacking, and classroom dialogue is unproductive. Finally, Nicola-Richmond et al.'s (2023) workplace lens offers criteria to articulate transfer measures when graduates enter the workforce.

Conclusion

The conceptualization and operationalization of student feedback literacy has undergone marked changes in the last two decades, from a personal cognitive construct to deeply relational, sociomaterial and ecologically oriented practice. This scoping review emphasizes that building robust feedback literacy in higher education, and in the EFL context, will not be just achieved through isolated interventions. It requires longitudinal, curriculum-embedded designs with students serving as evaluative mediators and engaging in structured peer conversations. Given the increasing integration of digital ecologies, learning analytics, and Generative AI in higher education, the construct of feedback literacy needs to be widened. Students are now required to critically interpret and negotiate machine-generated data, which requires new forms of "AI feedback literacy."

Finally, student feedback literacy is directly associated with teacher feedback literacy and the co-design of assessment contexts. For EFL learners who negotiate linguistic barriers in combination with complex academic genres, relational trust and explicitly modeled feedforward mechanisms are critical. This field will have to go beyond self-reported metrics as future work.

Future research should measure behavior to see how real uptake of feedback looks across various drafts and use digital log files. In the end, producing feedback-literate graduates is not just an academic undertaking, but a vital piece of institutional mandate for learners to meet the ongoing evaluative requirements of a contemporary professional workforce.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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

Author Contributions

A. Igembekova: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Writing – Original Draft Preparation.
A. Almatova: Conceptualization; Methodology; Writing – Review & Editing; Supervision;
Corresponding Author. M. Khaidarov: Supervision; Validation; Writing – Review & Editing.

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Information about the authors

Igembekova Ainash - Doctoral Student at Buketov Karaganda National Research University, Kazakhstan, Karaganda, ainashig@mail.ru, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4820-7908>

Aigerim Almatova - Doctoral student of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University Kazakhstan, Turkistan, aigerim.almatova@ayu.edu.kz, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4820-7908>, (corresponding author)

Khaydarov Mamat - Nizami Uzbekistan National Pedagogical University. Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Uzbekistan, Tashkent, asilbekmamatov2014@mail.ru, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7719-6200>

