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On the formation of communicative competence in foreign language learning among primary schoolchildren

M.H. Kylyshpayeva*¹, S.H. Kylyshpayeva², S.M. Mashanova³, M.G. Ashimova⁴,
A.S. Doskeldina⁵

^{1,3,4,5}Zhetysu University, Taldykorgan, Kazakhstan

²L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan

(E-mail: *¹madina_6709@mail.ru, ²sarbi_barbie@mail.ru, ³saniya.mashanova@mail.ru,
⁴malika_amg@mail.ru, ⁵aydana_d_n@mail.ru)

Abstract. This article explores the formation of communicative competence in foreign language learning among primary school students. The concept of communicative competence is defined, emphasizing its importance at an early age when language acquisition abilities are at their peak. The study highlights shortcomings in current foreign language instruction and presents findings from an experimental study comparing traditional and active teaching methods. The results reveal that interactive, student-centered approaches significantly improve students' ability to understand and communicate in a foreign language. The research also examines the broader decline in education quality and evaluates pedagogical strategies to address it. Emphasis is placed on motivation, age-appropriate methodologies, and the creation of a language-rich environment. Drawing on Kazakhstani and international practices, the article outlines effective methods and technologies for developing linguistic, intercultural, and cognitive components of communicative competence. The findings underscore the value of early, meaningful engagement in foreign language learning to build confident, capable young communicators.

Keywords: foreign language communicative competence, communication in a foreign language, foreign language education, primary school students, pedagogical methods and technologies, school system.

Introduction

The purpose of teaching a foreign language in the system of general education is the formation of foreign language communicative competence in students, the foundations of which are laid in primary school. The relevance of the chosen theme is due to the importance of a foreign language at the initial stage of education. It is in the period of primary school age that the basis of communication skills is formed: the child's ability for speech imitation and involuntary

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*corresponding author

acquisition of speech is maximal. Rapid speech development and activation of speech and thinking processes allows mastering the language easier than in any other age period.

In addition, at this stage of development, students are more open to language material, are sensitive to contextual learning, and are able to internalize communication norms naturally through play, interaction, and repetition.

Communicative competence – defined as the ability to engage in speech activities across various communicative contexts while considering the specific features of each situation – begins to develop in primary school. Many scholars in foreign language pedagogy highlight this ability, especially in intercultural communication settings, referring to it as “foreign language communicative competence” (Bim, Milrud, Safonova, Solovova & Shchukin n.d.).

The necessity of forming foreign language communicative competence at the primary school level is supported by numerous studies both domestically (Kunanbaeva, Bim, Bardina, Biboletova, Markova & Negnevitskaya n.d.) and internationally (Katz n.d.; Apeet n.d.; Johnson & Smith, 2022). The term “communicative competence” was first introduced in Western literature by Hymes (1972) and was later adopted into Russian academia by Zimnyaya. Initially applied within foreign language teaching, the concept has since evolved into both a core objective and an expected outcome of language learning (Bim, Grom, Safonova & Solovova n.d.). According to Biboletova, Gabeeva, and Trubaneva (2020), the formation of basic English language skills in primary students should be based on a communicative approach.

Within the foreign language subject area, communicative competence is a multifaceted construct comprising:

Speech competence: Developing communication skills encompassing speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Language competence: Acquiring linguistic elements such as phonetics, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and understanding linguistic structures and expression methods in both native and foreign languages.

Intercultural competence: Internalizing cultural patterns, customs, and social issues of the target language country, tailored to students’ experiences, interests, and psychological traits, while fostering the ability to represent their own culture in intercultural interactions (Li & Zhang, 2023).

Compensatory competence: The ability to navigate communication effectively despite gaps in language knowledge.

Learning and cognitive competence: Developing general and specialized learning skills and universal strategies of activity.

Communicative competence “is most effectively formed in a language-rich classroom where interaction is emphasized” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The primary goal of teaching foreign languages in elementary school is to develop the ability to communicate in English, considering the speech abilities and needs of young learners. Early language learning should demonstrate the practical application of knowledge and skills. Teachers must exceed the mere practice of exercises, providing opportunities for problem-solving, critical thinking, and reasoning about solutions. Equally important is fostering motivation for English learning. Active learning methods help to address these didactic objectives effectively (Dörnyei, 2020).

Mastering communicative competence involves developing all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The communicative skills acquired during foreign language lessons contribute to motivating students and applying their knowledge practically (Mercer, 2019).

Summarizing, many methodologists are actively addressing the formation of communicative competence in foreign language lessons. Although definitions vary slightly, the consensus describes communicative competence as the ability to understand and produce foreign-language utterances appropriately across diverse life situations, adhering to native speakers' communicative norms.

Thus, the core methodological focus of foreign language teaching in secondary schools should be fostering communicative competence. The teacher's primary task is to equip students with communicative abilities, achievable only in a communicative environment that simulates natural language use. This setting enables students to transfer classroom skills to real-life situations effectively (Ellis, 2020).

Achieving foreign language communicative competence requires the integration of appropriate organizational and pedagogical conditions, instructional forms, tools, and methods. These serve as structural and content elements within modern pedagogical technologies (Castro, Franco-Jenkins & Chaparro-Moreno, 2025).

This study aims to establish a conceptual framework and practical approach for developing foreign language communicative proficiency among young learners in elementary schools.

In Kazakhstan, academic interest in enhancing foreign language communicative abilities in education has grown since the early 2000s, with key contributors including Kunanbaeva (2010, 2012), Zhekibaeva (n.d.). Kunanbaeva advanced both theoretical and practical aspects of foreign language instruction across educational levels. Other scholars have focused on diagnostic components critical to assessing communicative skills in future foreign language teachers.

In Russia, the topic has evolved into a well-established research field. Researchers such as Kabardov (2005) and Batyreva (n.d.) have explored pedagogical prerequisites for developing foreign language communicative competence in young learners. Additional studies by Krichevskaya (2006), Vygotsky (1986), Smolkin (2010), Konyshev (2009), Rumyantseva (2011), and Asmolov emphasize the importance of accounting for the age-specific and psychological characteristics of learners in foreign language acquisition (Asmolov, 2012).

These factors are essential for designing effective curricula and creating a supportive learning environment that fosters meaningful language development.

Methods

The authors of the article, within the framework of the study of the topic, carried out the application of various methods based on a comprehensive theoretical analysis of modern scientific literature, as well as the generalization of pedagogical and methodological works in the field of developing communicative competence of elementary school students in a foreign language. This theoretical foundation provided a deep and critical understanding of existing approaches, identified gaps, and informed the design of the empirical study.

In addition to the theoretical analysis, the study utilized a combination of mathematical and statistical methods to ensure a rigorous quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of the implemented teaching approaches. Empirical methods employed included systematic observation, structured surveys, and diagnostic testing to collect relevant data on students' communicative competence development. Observation was carried out in natural classroom settings to monitor behavioral and interactional changes during the learning process, focusing on the active use of language in real-time communication.

The survey method involved the distribution of questionnaires designed to assess students' attitudes towards learning English, their motivation, and self-perceived communicative abilities.

These data provided insight into the affective and motivational factors influencing language acquisition at the primary school level.

Data processing techniques incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the collected quantitative data, enabling the identification of patterns, correlations, and significant differences between control and experimental groups. Techniques such as frequency analysis, cross-tabulation, and comparison of means were applied to interpret the results effectively and with high precision.

The study also made use of qualitative methods, including interviews and content analysis, to explore the subjective experiences of teachers and students. Interviews provided valuable feedback on the challenges and benefits of using active teaching methods and technologies, while content analysis helped to categorize and interpret qualitative responses in relation to the formation of communicative competence.

Deduction and induction were used as logical approaches throughout the research process. Deductive reasoning guided hypothesis formulation and testing based on existing theories, while inductive reasoning facilitated the generation of new insights and pedagogical recommendations derived from empirical findings.

Furthermore, the research design incorporated a quasi-experimental approach, including control and experimental groups, to systematically evaluate the impact of active teaching methods on the formation of communicative competence. This approach allowed for a comparative analysis and provided evidence of causality in the effectiveness of the applied pedagogical interventions (Lai, 2024).

Overall, the combination of theoretical, quantitative, and qualitative methodologies ensured a holistic and multifaceted investigation into the complex processes underlying communicative competence development among primary school students learning a foreign language, thus offering valuable implications for future educational practices.

Discussion and results

To qualitatively evaluate the effectiveness of using active methods and technologies as a means of developing communicative skills in English lessons in the 3rd grade, we conducted a teaching experiment. Participants of the experiment: one subgroup of 3 "A" class consisting of 12 students (control group) and one subgroup of 3 "B" class consisting of 12 students (experimental group). It was planned that in the control group, the work in the lessons would be carried out according to the traditional methodology, and in the experimental group, with the use of active methods and technologies. The purpose of the experiment was to test the effectiveness of using active methods and technologies as a means of teaching English to 3rd grade students. The experiment was conducted in three stages: Pre-experimental stage, which also included the preparatory stage; Experimental stage; Post-experimental stage. The process of teaching foreign language in primary school, the use of active methods and technologies in lessons, were discussed at the identification stage. Besides, the methodology of diagnostics of the initial level of communicative competence formation has been developed. 24 3d grade students, 2 English teachers and 5 student interns took part in the experimental work. In the realization of the set tasks, the following research methods were used: questionnaire, testing, interview, observation and interview. The purpose of the experimental work was to systematically apply active teaching methods in English language lessons and to observe how they influence the increase of cognitive interest of primary schoolchildren. We also turned our attention to determining the role of communicative competence during this experimental process.

As the results of the analysis and questionnaire survey of the educational process of foreign language in primary schools have shown, all teachers and students consider it important to use active methods and technologies in the educational process. But, from the teachers' point of view, the targeting of methods, in its own way, aligns with the problem. To determine the initial level of formation of communicative competence in a foreign language, the methods of test-interview, control and survey were used. During the experiment, it was found that the components of communicative competence in a foreign language are formed in students in different ways. They are characterized by high, medium, and low indicators. The diagnostic results are presented in the table. Such methods as test-interview, observation and questionnaire were used to determine the initial level of formation of communicative competence in a foreign language.

During the experiment, it was found that the components of communicative competence in a foreign language are formed in students in different ways, which allows us to talk about the levels of formation: high, medium, and low. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Initial Level of Development of Communicative Competence

Criterion for CC formation	High Level	Medium Level	Low Level
Language Competence	5 (20.8%)	11 (45.8%)	8 (33.4%)
Speech Communication	4 (16.7%)	10 (41.6%)	10 (41.7%)
Socio-cultural Competence	3 (12.5%)	9 (37.5%)	12 (50%)
Compensatory Competence	6 (25%)	8 (33.3%)	10 (41.7%)
Educational & Cognitive Competence	5 (20.8%)	9 (37.5%)	9 (41.7%)

Additionally, students were classified as communicatively active (60%) and passive (40%) based on a standardized evaluation, highlighting a significant proportion of learners with limited engagement in communicative activities. (Figure 1)

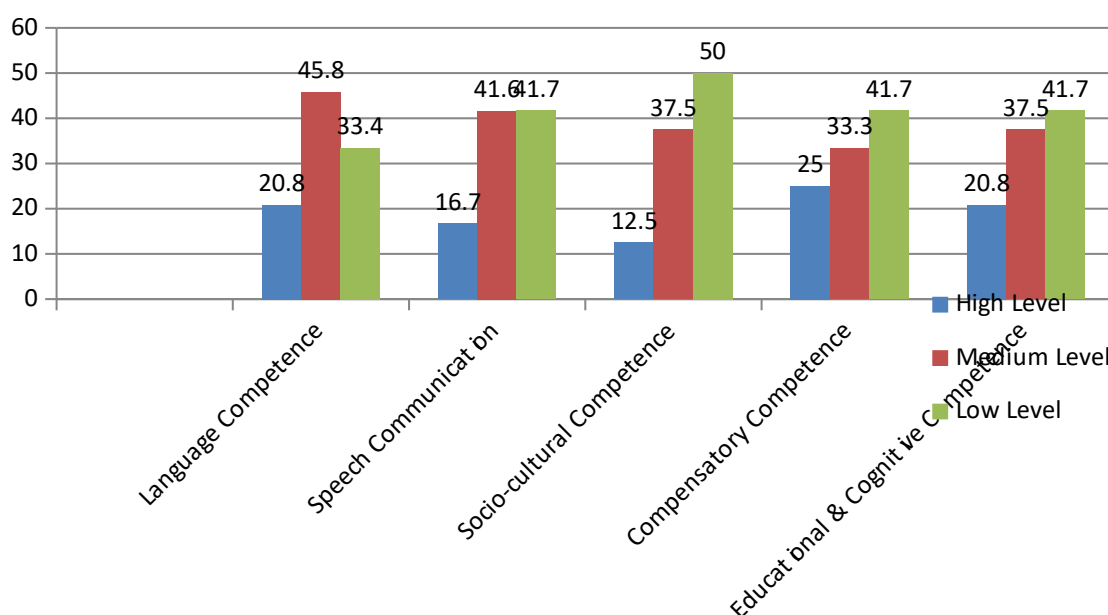


Fig. 1 Initial Level of Development of Communicative Competence

The main defining results of the experimental work showed a low level of foreign language proficiency. The plan to solve this problem revealed the need for purposeful work on the formation of communicative competence in primary school using various pedagogical and interactive methods. In this direction, it became clear that it is important to introduce didactic conditions leading to the development of the students' communicative competence in a foreign language.

At the second stage, the experimental training based on the step-by-step methodology of formation of communicative competence of primary schoolchildren with reliance on active methods and technologies took place and the results were analyzed. By studying new topics ("introduction", "rules of the road", "seasons"), we found an opportunity to develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, ensuring students' communicative and psychological sensitivity to the new linguistic world.

In the course of the work, two groups were formed: experimental and control. In the control group, the training was conducted as part of a traditional program. In the experimental group, implemented using active methods and technologies. The conducted experimental work showed an increased level of communicative skills of primary schoolchildren in a foreign language. This fact determines whether we have correctly analyzed didactic situations for the development of foreign language communication skills. The results are presented in the table below in Table 2:

Table 2. Final Level of Development of Communicative Competence (Experimental Group)

Criterion for CC formation	High Level	Medium Level	Low Level
Language Competence	13 (54.2%)	8 (33.3%)	3 (12.5%)
Speech Communication	14 (58.3%)	7 (29.2%)	3 (12.5%)
Socio-cultural Competence	11 (45.8%)	9 (37.5%)	4 (16.7%)
Compensatory Competence	15 (62.5%)	6 (25%)	3 (12.5%)
Educational & Cognitive Competence	12 (50%)	8 (33.3%)	4 (16.7%)

The proportion of students achieving a high level of communicative competence increased substantially – more than doubling in most criteria - demonstrating the strong impact of active methods and technologies on language learning outcomes.

The percentage of students with a low level of competence decreased markedly, indicating a successful reduction of learners struggling with communication skills.

Medium-level competence remained relatively stable, showing a positive shift with many students progressing from low to medium or high competence.

The most notable improvements were observed in speech communication and compensatory strategies, suggesting that students became more confident and capable of using language to communicate effectively, even when facing difficulties. (Figure 2)

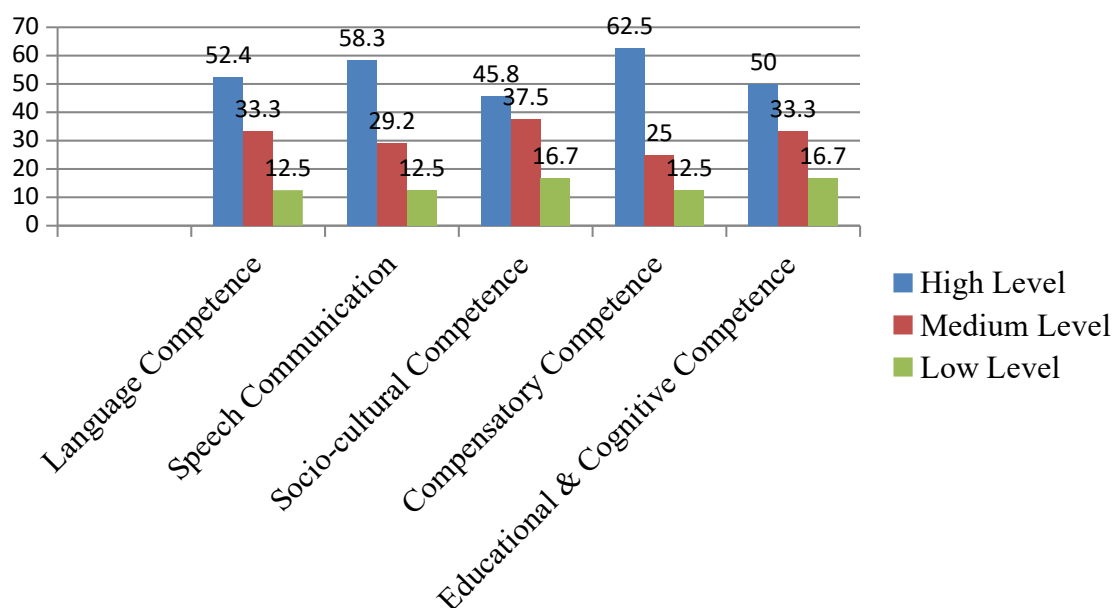


Fig. 2. Final Level of Development of Communicative Competence

In addition, students in the experimental group became noticeably more willing to participate in class discussions, more often took the initiative to speak in English and worked in teams with interest. This change in behavior indicates not only an increase in language skills, but also a positive change in attitudes towards communication and an increase in self-confidence. Teachers also noted that the atmosphere in the classroom became more lively and supportive - children began to actively help each other, which is especially important for primary school children. All this shows that active learning methods contribute not only to language acquisition, but also to the development of social-emotional skills, building pupils' confidence, openness and interest in co-operative learning.

Students began to show great initiative outside of lessons — for example, they enthusiastically completed creative homework, acted out skits, and even tried to use English in everyday communication, which indicates a deep inner motivation to learn.

Teachers reported that the use of modern interactive methods, including game-based learning and multimedia-supported tasks, significantly enhanced student motivation and active participation during lessons.

However, educators emphasized that effective integration of these approaches requires thoughtful planning and continuous professional development to overcome methodological challenges.

In conclusion, the study confirms that the development of foreign language communicative competence is a dynamic and continuous educational process that fosters adaptation to new linguistic and communicative models. The timely integration of communication skills into the curriculum facilitates active learning, engagement, and better overall educational outcomes for primary school learners.

Conclusion

Analyzing the literature, we understand that the goal of the modern school is not only to present knowledge, but also to prepare a capable person who can purposefully apply this

knowledge in life. But, obviously, the mental and sensory functions of human consciousness are crucially important in its implementation. Any student should be able to confidently deal with different situations and effectively solve problems. Foreign language communication is perceived not only as a process of transmitting and receiving information, but also as promoting mutual understanding in both business and simple social relationships. Evaluating the general opinion of advanced specialists of the modern Western educational system, we are convinced that Foreign Language Communicative Competence is perceived as a model of regulation, evaluation, and effective analysis of relationships. Mastering the skills of proper communication and its rational application in social processes is considered a feature of an active and responsible personality. Thus, one of the most important components of the success of modern education is the development of communication skills.

As the results of our study have shown, the formation of communicative skills of primary schoolchildren is influenced by a number of important factors: taking into account the psychological characteristics of primary schoolchildren, the use of optimal pedagogical approaches in accordance with age characteristics, and creating conditions for the formation of free self-expression and opinion in the student.

The application of various methods of activity technology and a competency-based approach is an effective means of developing communication skills. To summarize the overall research work, we have seen that through foreign language teaching, it is possible to develop advanced models of communicative skills in primary school. A foreign language is undoubtedly a means of shaping this new linguistic environment and cultural landscape. Therefore, with its help, we can awaken in the student's mind the essential abilities of a future active personality, empowering learners to become confident global citizens.

In modern education, developing communication skills is a critical factor in achieving success. Our research shows that communicative competence development in young learners depends on understanding their psychological characteristics, using age-appropriate pedagogical methods, and creating an environment encouraging free expression and personal attitude.

Introducing action-based learning and competence-based approaches has proven highly effective for developing communication skills among elementary school students (Assylzhanova & Sadykova, 2024).

In summary, foreign language teaching facilitates the formation of advanced communicative models in primary education. A foreign language serves as a powerful tool for shaping a new linguistic and cultural environment, awakening students' communicative abilities (García Sánchez & Rojas Lizana, 2022).

The results confirm that communicative competence development benefits from pedagogical approaches that consider cognitive, psychological, and motivational factors, as also supported by recent findings in educational psychology and language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2020; Mercer, 2019).

Authors' contributions:

M.Kh. Kylyshpayeva – formulation of scientific problems, development of research plans, methodological development, guidance and coordination of research.

S.Kh. Kylyshpayeva – writing the introduction, discussion and conclusions, editing and preparing the text for publication.

S.M. Mashanova – carrying out a critical analysis of the work, editing the text.

M.G. Ashimova – conducting experiments, collecting and processing data.

A.S. Dorskeldina – statistical analysis, interpretation of results.

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**М.Х. Кылышпаева*¹, С.Х. Кылышпаева², С.М. Машанова³, М.Г. Ашимова⁴,
А.С. Доскельдина⁵**

^{1,3,4,5}*І.Жансүгіров атындағы Жетісу университеті, Талдықорған, Қазақстан,*

²*Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан*

Бастауыш мектеп оқушыларының шет тілін оқытуда коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін қалыптастыру туралы

Андатпа. Мақалада коммуникативтік құзыреттілікті дамытуға баса назар аудара отырып, бастауыш мектептердегі шет тілін оқытудың рөлі қарастырылады. Ол осы негізгі ұғымға қысқаша анықтама береді және бастауыш деңгейде қазіргі шет тілін оқытудағы кемшіліктерді анықтаған эксперименттік зерттеу нәтижелерін талқылайды. Зерттеу сонымен қатар білім сапасының неғұрлым кеңірек төмендеуін талдайды және осы міндеттерді шешудің педагогикалық стратегияларын бағалайды. Зерттеу студенттердің ана тілінде сөйлейтіндерді түсіну және тиімді қарым-қатынас жасау қабілетін арттыру арқылы коммуникативтік құзыреттілікті арттырудың маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Бастапқы кезеңде шет тілін үйренуге қызығушылық пен мотивацияны арттыру өте маңызды. Қазақстандық және халықаралық контекстегі тәжірибелерге сүйене отырып, зерттеу коммуникативті құзыреттіліктің құрамдастарын дамытуға арналған арнайы әдістер мен технологиялардың тиімділігіне баса назар аударады. Зерттеу оқыту үдерісіне біріктірілген мақсатты педагогикалық тәсілдер жас студенттердің шет тілін меңгеру мен коммуникативтік дағдыларын айтарлықтай жақсартатынын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: шет тіліндегі коммуникативті құзыреттілік, шет тіліндегі қарым-қатынас, шет тіліндегі білім, бастауыш сынып оқушылары, педагогикалық әдістер мен технологиялар, мектеп жүйесі.

**М.Х.Кылышпаева*¹, С.Х.Кылышпаева², С.М. Машанова³,
М.Г. Ашимова⁴, А.С. Доскельдина⁵**

^{1,3,4,5}*Жетысуский университет имени И.Жансугурова, Талдықорған, Казахстан*

²*Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан*

О формировании коммуникативной компетенции в обучении иностранным языкам у младших школьников

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается роль обучения иностранным языкам в начальной школе с особым акцентом на формирование коммуникативной компетенции. Коммуникативная

компетенция кратко определяется как ключевой элемент успешного овладения иностранным языком. В работе обсуждаются результаты экспериментального исследования, выявившего недостатки и пробелы в современной системе обучения иностранным языкам на начальном уровне. Кроме того, анализируется общая тенденция снижения качества образования и оцениваются различные педагогические стратегии, направленные на решение данных проблем. В исследовании подчёркивается важность повышения коммуникативной компетенции через развитие у учащихся способности понимать иностранную речь и эффективно взаимодействовать с носителями языка. Особое внимание уделяется развитию интереса и мотивации к изучению иностранного языка на начальном этапе обучения. Опираясь на опыт Казахстана и международные практики, исследование выделяет эффективность применения конкретных методов и технологий, которые способствуют развитию различных компонентов коммуникативной компетенции. В итоге подчеркивается, что целенаправленные педагогические подходы, интегрированные в образовательный процесс, существенно повышают уровень владения языком и коммуникативные навыки младших школьников.

Ключевые слова: иноязычная коммуникативная компетенция, общение на иностранном языке, иноязычное образование, учащиеся начальных классов, педагогические методы и технологии, школьная система.

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Информация об авторах:

Кылышпаева М.Х. – автор для корреспонденции, преподаватель-лектор кафедры иностранных языков и переводческого дела Жетысуского университета имени И.Жансугурова, ул. Жансугурова, 187А, Талдыкорган, 040000, Казахстан

Кылышпаева С.Х. – эксперт Департамента науки Евразийского национального университета имени Л.Н.Гумилева, ул. Сатбаева, 2, Астана, 010008, Казахстан

Машанова С.М. – к.п.н., ассоциированный профессор кафедры иностранных языков и переводческого дела Жетысуского университета имени И.Жансугурова, ул. Жансугурова, 187А, Талдыкорган, 040000, Казахстан

Ашимова М.Г. – преподаватель-лектор кафедры иностранных языков и переводческого дела Жетысуского университета имени И.Жансугурова, ул. Жансугурова, 187А, Талдыкорган, 040000, Казахстан

Доскельдина А.С. – преподаватель-ассистент кафедры иностранных языков и переводческого дела Жетысуского университета имени И.Жансугурова, ул. Жансугурова, 187А, Талдыкорган, 040000, Казахстан

Авторлар туралы мәліметтер:

Кылышпаева М.Х. – хат-хабар авторы, І.Жансүгіров атындағы Жетісу университеті, шетел тілдері және аударма ісі кафедрасының оқытушы-дәріскері, І.Жансүгіров көшесі 187А, Талдықорған, 040000, Қазақстан

Кылышпаева С.Х. – Л.Н.Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Ғылым департаментінің сарапшысы, Сәтбаев көшесі 2, Астана, 010008, Қазақстан

Машанова С.М. – п.ғ.к., І.Жансүгіров атындағы Жетісу университеті, шетел тілдері және аударма ісі кафедрасының қауымдастырылған профессоры, І.Жансүгіров көшесі 187А, Талдықорған, 040000, Қазақстан

Ашимова М.Г. – І.Жансүгіров атындағы Жетісу университетінің шетел тілдері және аударма ісі кафедрасының оқытушы-дәріскері, І.Жансүгіров көшесі 187А, Талдықорған, 040000, Қазақстан

Доскельдина А.С. – І.Жансүгіров атындағы Жетісу университеті, шетел тілдері және аударма ісі кафедрасының оқытушы-ассистенті, І.Жансүгіров көшесі 187А, Талдықорған, 040000, Қазақстан

Information about the authors:

Kylyshpayeva M. – corresponding author, teacher-lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov, Zhansugurov street, 187A, Tal dykorgan, 040000, Kazakhstan

Kylyshpayeva S. – Expert of the Department of Science, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satpayev street 2, Astana, 010008, Kazakhstan

Mashanova S. – candidate of pedagogical sciences, Department of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov, Zhansugurov street, 187A, Tal dykorgan, 040000, Kazakhstan

Ashimova M. – teacher-lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov, Zhansugurov street, 187A, Tal dykorgan, 040000, Kazakhstan

Doskeldina A. – teacher-assistant, Department of Foreign Languages and Translation Studies, Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov, Zhansugurov street, 187A, Tal dykorgan, 040000, Kazakhstan