

## **Convergence of Formal and Non-Formal Foreign Language Education: An Analysis of Prospective Teachers in Terms of Professional Competencies**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to reveal the relationship between the formal and non-formal foreign language education skills of prospective teachers and their professional competency levels. The research was conducted using a descriptive survey model. The sample consists of 273 prospective teachers studying in the first to fourth years of foreign language departments at Karaganda Buketov University in Kazakhstan during the 2024–2025 academic year. Data were collected using the "Professional Competency Scale for Prospective Foreign Language Teachers" and the "Formal and Non-Formal Education Skills Scale." The analysis included the Independent Samples t-Test, F-Test, and Multiple Regression Analysis. The findings showed that formal and integrated education skills were high, while non-formal education skills were moderate. Competency in using teaching methods did not differ significantly by gender, but classroom management, student engagement, and overall professional competency showed significant differences in favor of female students. Formal and integration skills did not differ significantly by gender, whereas non-formal skills did, in favor of male students. Competency in using teaching methods and classroom management did not vary by grade level, while student engagement and overall competency did, in favor of third- and fourth-year students. Formal and non-formal skills together explained about 12.8% of the variance in professional competency. Suggestions were made to explore the nature of this relationship through mixed-method research and different variables.

**Keywords:** *Foreign language education, formal and non-formal education, professional competencies, prospective teachers.*

### **Introduction**

The increasing prevalence of technology-enhanced learning environments has further facilitated the integration of formal and non-formal approaches. Discussions conducted on online platforms, virtual project work, and community-based practices enable language skills to be linked with real-life contexts. In teacher education programs, developing foreign language skills and understanding how to transfer these skills into classroom settings are of great importance. The interaction between formal (institutional) and non-formal (non-institutional) educational approaches is considered one

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of the key factors that enhance the quality of this process (Bloom & Gascoigne, 2017). In particular, the structural and curriculum-oriented advantages of formal education, when integrated with the flexible and experiential nature of non-formal education, have been reported to increase student motivation and facilitate improved learning outcomes. This contributes significantly to the professional development of prospective teachers, equipping them not only with knowledge of language and teaching methods but also with strategies to foster learner autonomy and motivation (Alshahrani, 2019; Chan, 2023).

Formal education refers to institutional learning processes that are carried out with specific curricula and standardized assessment tools, typically resulting in a diploma or certificate (Tudor, 2013). Non-formal education, on the other hand, includes programs such as community-based or independent courses, workshops, and online activities, which are based on flexible participation and focused on the interests and needs of participants (Eaton, 2010; Baker, 2019). In foreign language instruction, reinforcing the theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom through extracurricular activities makes the language learning process more holistic and permanent (Brebera, 2018). Additionally, this integrated approach helps learners develop 21st-century skills such as leadership, teamwork, and cultural awareness (Garner et al., 2014). After graduation, teachers are expected to adopt methods that combine theoretical knowledge with active and experiential learning in the classroom (Chatti et al., 2011). The integration of formal and non-formal approaches helps reduce learners' anxiety about the language learning process and strengthens their communication skills. Moreover, during this process, prospective teachers also improve their ability to use digital resources and technological tools, making them more flexible and well-equipped for their future professional lives (Ashraf et al., 2022). In this context, the aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between prospective teachers' formal and non-formal foreign language education skills and their level of professional competency.

Experimental data reveal that teacher candidates involved in convergent environments are more creative in technology use, more effective in social projects, and more successful in increasing student motivation. This strengthens the candidates' self-confidence and openness to innovative approaches, ultimately facilitating the delivery of higher-quality education (Chan, 2023). Additionally, it emphasizes that for convergent approaches to have a permanent place in the curricula of education faculties, institutional support, adequate technopedagogical equipment, and collaborative environments must be provided. This is because the implementation of such

innovative approaches can only be achieved not only through individual efforts but also through administrative and policy-level regulations (Lipuma & Cristo, 2022). Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies report that as students' participation in formal and non-formal activities increases, they achieve more lasting success in language learning and develop multicultural awareness, engaging in more international collaborations throughout their careers (Christopher, 2024; Clifford & Reisinger, 2018). Programs combining technology-based platforms and community projects ensure wider accessibility and sustainability due to increased opportunities for independent learning and ease of online access to diverse cultural environments (Traxler et al., 2015; Enríquez, 2017). Convergent models have been found to yield more positive results in linguistic proficiency, communication skills, and student motivation (Coroama, 2011; Brebera, 2018), while candidates trained in such models demonstrate greater creativity in lesson planning, stronger student-centered practices, and more effective adaptation of technology to pedagogical goals (Harfitt & Chow, 2020; Chan, 2023).

Case studies illustrate that prospective teachers who combine formal lesson plans with non-formal practices such as community-based events or digital tools develop stronger classroom management, project planning, and instructional design skills (Christopher, 2024; Bloom & Gascoigne, 2017). For example, during museum visits, students use the target language more confidently, while candidates gain experience beyond formal instruction. Similarly, integrating online gamification with real-world language clubs results in students applying grammar in both academic and everyday contexts (Vetter, 2014). Collaboration with local associations and cultural institutions further strengthens integration between formal and non-formal modes (Gada, 2022). Although these candidates occasionally encounter implementation challenges, their ability to produce flexible and creative solutions reflects a core skill of professional teaching. The present study synthesizes these insights to examine how integrating formal and non-formal language education supports the development of professional competencies among teacher candidates in Kazakhstan, offering empirical data in a relatively underexplored context. Grounded in these contributions to the literature, the present research proceeds with a structured inquiry into how such convergence can be empirically assessed within the context of foreign language teacher education.

This study aims to fill the existing research gap regarding the integration of formal and non-formal foreign language education. While there are numerous studies examining these approaches separately, there is limited research assessing their holistic impact on teacher candidates' professional competencies (Chan, 2023). Specifically, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis of which theoretical frameworks and applied activities effectively converge formal and non-formal education in teacher training programs at higher education institutions. This study aims to investigate how these two approaches can complement each other, their common advantages, and potential risks. It also clarifies how formal and non-formal methods together support the development of teacher candidates' multifaceted educational skills. The primary objective of this research is to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the integration of formal and non-formal foreign language education affects professional competencies. Based on the findings, the study aims to develop model recommendations for teacher training programs and offer a theoretical framework to guide future research. In this respect, the research offers valuable insights not only for academic circles but also for teachers in the field, educational administrators, and policymakers. The results may have the potential to shift language teaching from a uniform, content-focused structure to an interaction- and experience-based paradigm.

In this regard, the aim of the study is to examine the level of professional competence of teacher candidates in formal and non-formal foreign language education. In line with this aim, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of professional competence and non-formal and formal educational skills of foreign language teacher candidates?
2. Does gender affect their professional competence?
3. Does gender influence their formal and non-formal foreign language education skills?
4. Is there a difference in professional competence levels according to class levels?
5. Is there a difference in formal and non-formal foreign language education skills according to class levels?
6. Are formal and non-formal foreign language education skills significant predictors of professional competence?

**Problem**

Although the convergence of formal and non-formal education has been emphasized in global literature, its practical integration into teacher education programs in Kazakhstan is still underdeveloped and fragmented (Lipuma & Cristo, 2022). This gap hinders prospective teachers from offering students an innovative and multidimensional learning experience after graduation. Although some universities and faculties of education aim to integrate formal and non-formal education through pilot programs, these efforts have yet to be fully institutionalized or embedded within curriculum structures (Enríquez, 2017; Latypov, 2017). Notably, inconsistencies are reported among institutions regarding student-centered learning, project-based instruction, and technology integration. This situation limits the development of professional competencies among prospective teachers and delays their attainment of expertise in the field (Capaldi & Ceccherelli, 2019; Peng & Fu, 2021). Furthermore, empirical data on the applicability and sustainability of models developed to integrate formal and non-formal activities in practice remain insufficient. The failure of prospective teachers to fully adopt innovative methods that enhance student motivation and support long-term language learning adversely affects expected outcomes in foreign language education. At this point, identifying institutional and individual barriers and developing practical solutions has become a primary goal for researchers and educators (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Lekamge et al., 2024). However, it remains unclear how formal and non-formal approaches can be integrated into traditional classroom dynamics and to what extent technology should be used in this process.

Some studies have shown that prospective teachers struggle with technology literacy and designing project-based learning activities (Peng & Fu, 2021). At the root of this issue is the lack of comprehensive courses within education faculty programs that integrate formal and non-formal components. For instance, candidates who are introduced to community-based practices often do not receive adequate guidance on how to combine these practices with classroom-based assessment methods (Christopher, 2024). Moreover, during field experiences or practicum programs, candidates are not sufficiently encouraged to design or implement non-formal activities. This negatively affects their confidence in using innovative approaches in their own teaching practices after graduation. The lack of inter-institutional collaboration and practice-oriented training models results in difficulties for candidates attempting to apply what they have learned

theoretically in real classroom settings (Harfitt & Chow, 2020). Consequently, although the need for combining formal and non-formal approaches is acknowledged, the practical implementation of this knowledge remains limited. This challenge undermines the quality of teacher education and hinders comprehensive development goals in foreign language teaching (Traxler et al., 2015).

In many higher education institutions, non-formal activities are perceived merely as supplementary "extracurricular" efforts, and thus are not included in official credit or evaluation systems (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). This perception leads prospective teachers to believe that non-formal activities are undervalued at the institutional level, resulting in limited participation. Similarly, curricula in faculties of education tend to emphasize formal education content, while non-formal activities are often treated as optional or secondary components. This causes teacher candidates to be trained with a textbook- and exam-oriented mindset, leading them to avoid innovative strategies in their teaching practices (Bekpenbetova et al., 2025; Capaldi & Ceccherelli, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of clarity regarding assessment and evaluation methods for non-formal learning complicates efforts to demonstrate the effectiveness of these activities and hinders their wider implementation. Although the literature repeatedly emphasizes that integrated practices improve student achievement and motivation (Coroama, 2011; Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Peng & Fu, 2021), the lack of formal recognition negatively affects the sustainability of such practices. In this context, although prospective teachers are aware of the importance of synthesizing these two approaches, institutional and administrative barriers often lead them to hesitate in undertaking comprehensive projects.

## **Literature Review**

### **Formal and Non-Formal Foreign Language Education**

The three fundamental types of learning—formal, non-formal, and informal—represent different yet complementary processes in foreign language education. Formal education encompasses instructional practices conducted within institutional settings such as schools and universities, in accordance with officially recognized curricula. This type of education is structured around a specific timetable, instructional materials, and assessment criteria, and typically results in a diploma, certificate, or degree (Tudor, 2013). In contrast, non-formal education is defined as educational activities based on flexible participation principles, often conducted independently of

or in cooperation with official institutions (Eaton, 2010). These activities may include courses, workshops, seminars, language clubs, or initiatives carried out via online platforms. In non-formal education, learners' needs, interests, and learning styles are more central, and both content and methods are arranged more flexibly (Enríquez, 2017; Hadizadeh & Youbi, 2024). Informal education, on the other hand, refers to unstructured and spontaneous learning processes that occur through daily life experiences, socialization, travel, media use, hobbies, or volunteer work (Rogers, 2014). These three concepts reflect different dynamics of learning. While formal education is more systematic and institutional, non-formal education is more flexible and community-based, and informal education is a natural and self-directed form of learning. In foreign language learning, it is believed that these three educational types should be considered together in order to maximize learners' linguistic competence (Blake et al., 2023; Makeleni et al., 2023; Yeleussiz & Qanay, 2025). This is because language is not only composed of rules but also serves as a means of communication and interaction. Therefore, using language in various contexts and experiencing its cultural dimension cannot be limited to either formal or non-formal education alone. Especially for prospective teachers, the interaction and balance between these three learning types are crucial for the comprehensive development of professional competencies. Additionally, clearly distinguishing these concepts in foreign language education enhances the clarity of the integration discussions in the following sections. As such, the relevant literature includes many studies that explore the interaction among formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Kelava & Žagar, 2014). These studies provide a foundation for more holistic models in foreign language education by explaining both the differences and commonalities among these types of learning.

Historically, formal, non-formal, and informal learning have been seen as distinct domains, but over time, this separation has become increasingly blurred. For many years, official institutions such as schools and universities were regarded as the sole sources of "academic knowledge." However, the rapid development of technology and the diversification of societal needs have increased interest in learning opportunities beyond formal institutions (Lytras, Pouloudi & Poulymenakou, 2002). Especially in foreign language education, learners can now benefit from non-formal and informal learning experiences by using online language learning platforms, mobile applications, social media groups, or international communication networks. Nevertheless, the structured curricula, teaching materials, and assessment tools provided by formal education remain critically important for building a solid foundation in language learning. Language clubs,

community-based projects, online speaking practices, and cultural events stand out as examples of non-formal education in practice. Through such activities, learners communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, thereby engaging in language practice while also developing cultural awareness (Bloom & Gascoigne, 2017; Tazhigulova et al., 2018). For prospective teachers, the integration of these two types of learning supports areas such as pedagogical diversity and student-centered approaches. Combining the solid theoretical basis of formal education with the practical and authentic experiences of non-formal learning enhances both linguistic and professional skills of teacher candidates. Informal learning, on the other hand, is said to sustain learners' motivation, enable them to experience the language in natural contexts, and facilitate cultural interaction (Novari & Dayat, 2018). From this perspective, when formal and non-formal learning types are integrated with informal learning, the language learning process becomes a much richer and more effective experience. For instance, teacher candidates may apply the theoretical knowledge they acquire in university courses during overseas travels or on social media platforms, thereby improving both their linguistic and cultural skills simultaneously. Moreover, this multidimensional learning experience helps prospective teachers internalize not only grammar rules but also communication strategies and pedagogical methods (Paşcalău et al., 2022). In this regard, it is recommended that teacher education programs offer an interdisciplinary and integrated teaching process that considers all three types of learning (Tleuzhanova, 2023). Relying solely on formal education may limit learners' abilities in creative thinking, critical perspectives, or real-life language use. Similarly, focusing only on non-formal or informal learning may hinder the systematic acquisition of fundamental language structures. Therefore, the literature emphasizes that all three types of learning should be blended in a balanced and goal-oriented manner (Capaldi & Ceccherelli, 2019; Chan, 2023).

The recognition of non-formal foreign language education in higher education policies has become increasingly important in recent years. Traditionally, universities have prioritized curricula conducted within the framework of formal education and have assessed student success through courses, exams, and specific evaluation criteria. However, global competition and technological advancements have heightened the need for universities to diversify their educational programs and embrace innovative practices (Brebera, 2018; Seeber, 2019; Batardière & Jeanneau, 2020). Non-formal education offers students opportunities to practice and use language in various communicative contexts beyond the traditional classroom setting. This not only enhances students'



academic and professional skills but also equips them for more effective participation in international collaborations (Chan, 2023). The recognition of non-formal learning by universities such as awarding credit for volunteer work, language clubs, community -based projects, or online activities - is seen as a motivating factor that enriches the learning process (Coroama, 2011; Lipuma & Cristo, 2022). In this way, higher education institutions can systematically monitor students' foreign language development not only through formal education but also through non-formal learning environments. Specifically for teacher candidates, this recognition encourages openness to more innovative and flexible methods in the educational strategies they will implement in the future.

### **Formal and Non-Formal Foreign Language Education in Convergent Contexts**

Convergent foreign language education is an approach that aims to provide learners with a multifaceted and continuous experience by designing formal and non-formal learning environments in a coordinated manner (Gokiart et al., 2021; Deek & Collins, 2023). At the core of this approach lies the principle of reinforcing the knowledge acquired in the classroom with diverse experiences outside the classroom, thereby fostering a deeper development of linguistic competence (Enríquez, 2017; Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Katsara, 2024). In the convergent model, supporting the planned curriculum and academic assessment tools with non-formal activities increases learners' motivation and engagement in the language learning process. For example, applying a grammar structure learned in formal education during a non-formal language club activity enhances the retention of knowledge (Criado & González-Romero, 2023). Similarly, speaking practices conducted through online platforms and the use of materials such as podcasts or videos contribute to the enrichment of formal course content. Thus, the learning process extends beyond the four walls of the classroom, continuing in various areas of daily life such as home, work, or social environments.

For prospective teachers, convergent foreign language education not only promotes language skills but also is reflected in practice through the diversification of instructional material design, assessment methods, and classroom management strategies. This structure contributes to professional development and strengthens the theory-practice balance in faculties of education (Harfitt & Chow, 2020). Studies in the literature have shown that programs based on the convergent model lead to increased student achievement and frequency of language use (Telles &

Vassalo, 2006; Bloom & Gascoigne, 2017; Chan, 2023). In this context, prospective teachers develop a multidimensional perspective on language learning by integrating in-class and out-of-class activities. With its flexible and inclusive nature, the model transcends the conventional boundaries of the classroom and transforms language learning into a lifelong activity (Herr et al., 2019).

Technology plays a key role in the convergence of formal and non-formal foreign language education. Tools such as computer-assisted language learning platforms, mobile applications, virtual classrooms, and online discussion groups largely eliminate spatial and temporal limitations in learning processes (Assylzhanova et al., 2024; Chatti et al., 2011; Lai, She & Li, 2024; Maja, 2023). These tools enable learners to use the target language actively outside the classroom and interact with peers or other learners globally. They offer an ideal basis for enhancing formal course content and expanding non-formal learning opportunities (Brebera, 2018; Telles & Vassalo, 2006). By placing technology at the center of the learning process, prospective teachers can develop strategies that foster learners' self-regulation skills and motivation. For instance, reinforcing in-class topics through online tests, simulations, or discussion forums supports a multidimensional learning process (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Lipuma & Leon, 2024). Technological tools also provide advantages such as personalized feedback, automated correction, and instant assessment, which significantly enhance the effectiveness of both formal and non-formal learning processes (Hamzah et al., 2021; Kobari et al., 2023).

However, successful technology integration requires prospective teachers to possess digital pedagogical competencies. It is crucial not only to use digital tools but also to integrate them with appropriate instructional strategies and to design activities aligned with learning objectives (Latypov, 2017; Orakova et al., 2024). Faculties of education and professional development programs should therefore provide comprehensive training in the effective use of digital tools, the creation of digital materials, and the management of online interaction. For example, facilitating group work in virtual classrooms, using collaborative document-editing platforms, or guiding students in digital discussion environments are core competencies that prospective teachers should acquire (Peng & Fu, 2021). In addition to these benefits, teacher candidates must also be aware of issues such as classroom management, data security, and student ethics. These efforts ensure that in convergent foreign language education, technology is not merely a tool, but a transformative factor in the learning process (Traxler et al., 2015; Jiang et al., 2021; Chung, 2019).

In environments where formal and non-formal foreign language education converge, learner autonomy emerges as a critical component. In traditional formal education, learners typically follow content and activities determined by the teacher, with assessment conducted through centralized methods. In contrast, non-formal settings allow learners to choose activities based on their interests and define personal learning goals, leading to more active engagement in the process (Eaton, 2010). The convergence of these two approaches offers learners both the security of a structured curriculum and the freedom to manage their own learning. Learner autonomy is particularly essential in language education, as effective language use can only be sustained through personal motivation and consistent engagement (Moore, 1972).

By closely observing this dynamic, prospective teachers learn to design lesson plans that are more flexible and responsive to students' interests and needs. They also develop strategies to sustain learner motivation and interest through effective feedback mechanisms. In this way, the rigid evaluation characteristic of formal education is harmonized with the voluntary and experiential learning principles of non-formal education, resulting in a motivation-based learning ecosystem (Chan, 2023). Ultimately, promoting learner autonomy and motivation in convergent environments significantly contributes to the professional competence and future success of prospective teachers.

### **Models and Strategies For Converging Formal and Non-Formal Language Education**

There are various approaches and practices in foreign language education where formal and non-formal environments can be used together. Blended Learning, one of these approaches, stands out as an innovative method frequently employed to integrate formal and non-formal foreign language education. This approach synthesizes traditional classroom activities with online and non-face-to-face learning environments, enabling students to experience a multifaceted learning process. Blended Learning applications offer teacher candidates the opportunity to simultaneously engage with curriculum-based content and independent, flexible learning environments. Particularly in foreign language education, discussions conducted on online platforms, digital exercises, and interactive tasks reinforce theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom, thereby enriching the learning process. Such blended models not only assist students in improving their language structures and vocabulary but also provide them with the chance to correct their mistakes through instant feedback mechanisms. The literature contains substantial evidence indicating that language

programs utilizing blended learning enhance student engagement and satisfaction (Ashraf et al., 2022). Additionally, teacher candidates learn to effectively use online tools in lesson preparation, material selection, and assessment processes through this approach. Moreover, blended learning allows students to adjust their learning pace according to their personal interests, thereby supporting individualized learning and sustaining their motivation and participation in lessons. In recent years, the growing importance of distance education due to global crises such as the pandemic has further increased the prevalence and acceptance of blended models (Jiang, Chen, Lu & Wang, 2021).

Community-based and experiential learning models provide striking examples of the integration of formal and non-formal processes in foreign language education. In these models, students actively use the target language in real-life-like settings, often through non-governmental organizations, local communities, or cultural events (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Zhetpisbayeva et al., 2016). Known as Community-Based Learning (CBL), this approach combines language learning with community service or social responsibility projects. Thus, students develop their language skills not only through classroom exercises but also while devising solutions to real-world problems or organizing events for societal benefit (Baker, 2019; Zhetpisbayeva et al., 2016). Such experiential learning processes boost students' motivation, reduce their hesitancy in using the language, and ensure retention by applying what they have learned in practice (Clifford & Reisinger, 2018).

Community-based projects offer students a tangible context for using the target language while fostering important values such as cultural awareness, empathy, and social responsibility. For teacher candidates, this model provides the ability to transcend traditional classroom methods, making learning multidimensional and sensitive to societal contexts. Experiential learning approaches extend language learning beyond classroom walls, encouraging students to become active participants in their learning process. Particularly through service-learning or volunteer-based projects, language learners can interact with local communities or international initiatives (Gokiart et al., 2021). This interaction enhances students' communication skills while increasing their sensitivity to the communities they live in or to global issues. In this process, teacher candidates guide students by setting appropriate goals, providing feedback, and conducting assessments (Harfitt & Chow, 2020). Teacher candidates also help students make sense of their experiences, set new learning objectives, and develop solutions to societal issues using their

language skills. For instance, language students participating in an environmental cleanup project take on responsibilities by preparing posters, writing instructions in the target language, or creating project reports, actively using the language. This process goes beyond the boundaries imposed by formal curricula, deepening students' ability to communicate in real-world contexts (Poole, Agosto, Lin & Yan, 2022).

### **The Impact Of Converging Language Education On Teacher Professional Competencies**

The integration of formal and non-formal foreign language education requires teachers to assume new pedagogical roles and responsibilities beyond their traditional roles. In the traditional system, the teacher typically holds the position of transmitting knowledge and evaluating students; however, in integrated approaches, the teacher assumes the role of a guide, mentor, and leader who coordinates the learning process (Harfitt, 2019). This convergence ensures that students not only master the curriculum content but also develop 21st-century skills. For example, in project-based or community-based tasks, the teacher directs students while allowing them to discover their individual talents and generate original solutions. Similarly, in the case of digital platforms or blended learning tools, the teacher plays a crucial role in content selection, material preparation, and managing online interaction (Chung, 2019). However, the teacher's responsibilities are expanding, and it has become essential to develop a flexible approach in order to respond quickly to students' continuously changing needs.

The preparation of teacher candidates for these new roles is closely related to transformations in the curricula of teacher education faculties. For example, in addition to formal lesson planning, it is important to train teacher candidates in organizing non-formal activities, collaborating with the community, and integrating technology (Chan, 2023). While this responsibility may seem like an additional workload for candidates, it actually offers them the opportunity to deepen their expertise and specialize professionally. Among the new pedagogical roles is the ability to design customized learning environments for students with varying levels and interests. This requires a convergent change for teachers, ranging from classroom management to assessment processes (Lipuma & Leon, 2024). Therefore, integrated foreign language education not only demands that the teacher transmits the rules of the target language but also provides students with the strategies and motivation necessary to manage their own learning processes.

The adoption of these new roles has lasting effects on teachers' professional lives. For example, a teacher actively involved in community-based projects creates unique learning opportunities for students by linking the educational institution with the local community or international networks (Deek & Collins, 2023; Denizci, 2023). This practice opens the door for teachers to assume responsibilities beyond the conventional ones, even gaining experience in project management, sponsorship, and resource development. Similarly, in blended learning practices, teachers are equipped with additional skills such as preparing digital materials, managing online learning communities, and organizing technological tools to align with lesson objectives. This convergent responsibility set increases the dynamism of the teaching profession and transforms teachers into "lifelong learners" (Christopher, 2024). By experiencing this process, teacher candidates acquire flexibility, allowing them to easily adapt to rapidly changing educational technologies and learning approaches upon graduation. Additionally, the relationship between teachers and students is transforming, creating a more democratic, participatory, and reciprocal learning environment (Mooney & Edwards, 2001). While responsibilities increase, positive changes are also observed in teachers' motivation and professional satisfaction levels. These new roles provide teachers with opportunities to closely monitor students' development, support them individually, and generate creative solutions throughout the educational process.

In the preparation of teacher candidates for integrated language education, technology training and digital pedagogical skills play a crucial role. Candidates learn to effectively use online teaching platforms, smart board applications, interactive video tools, and social media-based learning groups (Peng & Fu, 2021). These tools provide benefits across a broad range, from lesson planning to student tracking, peer assessment, and online feedback. Additionally, recognizing that technology is not only a tool but also a transformative power in pedagogical strategies ensures that teacher candidates are more open to innovative practices. One of the primary goals of integrated education is to encourage students to engage in lifelong learning and actively utilize different learning channels (Deek & Collins, 2023). Therefore, teacher candidates develop various methods to instill self-regulation skills in students, support learner autonomy, and sustain learning motivation. For instance, by guiding student projects such as blog writing, creating video content, or recording podcasts, candidates ensure that students use language in diverse ways. These activities both reinforce formal language skills and enhance creativity and communication abilities in non-formal settings (Chatti, Schroeder & Jarke, 2011).

## **Method**

This section includes the research model, the population and sample, data collection instruments, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **Research Design**

This research was conducted using a descriptive survey model. As is well known, descriptive research aims to describe the situation of interest. Survey models, on the other hand, are based on revealing the existing situation as it is, using an objective approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the relationship between the formal and non-formal foreign language teaching skills and professional competencies of teacher candidates studying in foreign language departments of universities in Kazakhstan was descriptively examined on a relational basis.

### **Study Group**

The population of the study consists of foreign language teacher candidates studying at universities in Kazakhstan during the 2024-2025 academic year. The criterion sampling method was used in determining the study group. The criteria for selecting the study group were that the participants should be students in foreign language departments and be teacher candidates. Based on these criteria, the study group consists of a total of 273 teacher candidates from the foreign language departments of Karaganda Buketov University in Kazakhstan, including first, second, third, and fourth-year students. Of the teacher candidates in the study group, 53.84% (n=147) are female, and 46.14% (n=126) are male. Among the participants, 63 are first-year students, 104 are second-year students, 49 are third-year students, and 57 are fourth-year students.

### **Data Collection Tools**

To collect data from foreign language teacher candidates, the "Foreign Language Teacher Candidates' Professional Competence Scale" and the "Formal and Non-Formal Education Skills Scale for Foreign Language Teacher Candidates" were used.

#### ***Foreign Language Teacher Candidates' Professional Competence Scale***

The "Teacher Efficacy Scale," developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), was used to gather the data. This scale consists of three sub-dimensions: teaching methods, classroom management, and student engagement competencies. Each sub-dimension contains 8 questions,

making a total of 24 questions. The frequency of responses ranges from 1 to 5, where "1" indicates "nothing" and "5" indicates "completely." The reliability of the scale was tested through a pilot study. In the 2025 academic year, the survey was distributed to teacher candidates from the same department at a different university, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. For the current research data, Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.88.

### ***Formal and Non-Formal Education Skills Scale for Foreign Language Teacher Candidates***

The "Formal and Non-Formal Education Skills Scale for Foreign Language Teacher Candidates" was developed by the researchers based on the studies of Brebera (2018), Diković and Plavšić (2015), Tudor (2013), and Vaculíková et al. (2023). The scale consists of two dimensions: Formal Education Skills (10 items) and Non-Formal Education Skills (8 items). The scale, containing 18 items, uses a 5-point Likert scale. The total score obtained from the scale reflects the "Integration Skills" measure. The items are rated as "Completely agree," "Agree," "Somewhat agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly disagree." Factor analysis revealed that the scale explains 54.52% of the total variance, and the two-dimensional structure was confirmed. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale was found to be 0.90.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected data were first organized and arranged. Two cases with incomplete data were deleted, and the analysis was performed on the remaining 285 data points. The first research question was answered using descriptive statistics. The levels of foreign language education skills (formal and non-formal) and professional competencies of teacher candidates were determined based on the mean scores obtained from the scales. The minimum-maximum score range for the scales was divided into three equal intervals, and the levels of formal and non-formal foreign language education skills and professional competencies were determined.

The second, third, fourth, and fifth research questions were answered by comparing the scores of teacher candidates based on class level and gender. To do this, the skewness-kurtosis values (see Table 1) and Kolmogorov test results were examined (Yang & Berdine, 2021), and it was tested whether the data followed a normal distribution ( $p > 0.05$ ). Additionally, a multicollinearity test was conducted to check if there was any multicollinearity issue between the relationships of professional competence and formal and non-formal education skills (see Table 2). The results of the collinearity test showed that there was no multicollinearity problem between the variables. The



normality tests confirmed that the data met the assumptions of normal distribution. Based on this, an "Independent Samples t-Test" was conducted for analyzing scale scores according to gender, and an "ANOVA" was used for comparisons based on class level.

The final research question analyzed the relationships between the formal and non-formal foreign language education skills and professional competence of teacher candidates. This stage was carried out using "Multiple Regression Analysis."

## Table 1

*Skewness and Kurtosis Values of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates' Professional Competencies, Formal and Non-Formal Education Skills Scores*

Variables		Statistic	Std. Error
Professional Competencies	Skewness	-0,64	0,15
	Kurtosis	0,37	0,29
Non-formal	Skewness	-0,63	0,15
	Kurtosis	-0,36	0,29
Formal	Skewness	-0,81	0,15
	Kurtosis	0,78	0,29

## Table 2

### *Collinearity and VIF Values Regarding the Research Variables*

			Variance			Collinearity Statistics	
			Proportions				
	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	(Constant)	Non_formal	Formal	Tolerance	VIF
1	2,95	1,00	0,00	0,00	0,00		
2	0,03	9,87	0,01	0,79	0,50	0,91	1,10
3	0,02	12,53	0,98	0,21	0,49	0,91	1,10

a. Dependent Variable: Professional Competencies

### Findings

In the first finding of the study, the question "What is the level of foreign language teacher candidates' professional competencies and their non-formal and formal education skills?" was addressed. The descriptive statistics results for this purpose are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics for Foreign Language Teacher Candidates' Professional Competencies, Formal, and Non-Formal Education Skill Scores*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teaching Methods	273	1,00	5,00	3,35	0,85
Classroom Management	273	1,00	5,00	3,65	1,08
Student Participation	273	1,00	5,00	3,85	0,79
Professional Competencies General	273	1,44	5,00	3,62	0,68
Non-Formal Skills	273	1,50	5,00	3,38	0,74
Formal Skills	273	1,00	5,00	3,87	0,80
Integration	273	1,42	5,00	3,63	0,61

When Table 3 is examined, it is determined that the foreign language teacher candidates' competencies in using teaching methods are at a moderate level ( $\bar{X} = 3.35$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ), whereas their competencies in classroom management ( $\bar{X} = 3.65$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ), student participation ( $\bar{X} = 3.85$ ;  $SD = 0.79$ ), and overall professional competencies ( $\bar{X} = 3.62$ ;  $SD = 0.68$ ) are at a high level.

According to Table 3, the average score for non-formal education skills of all foreign language teacher candidates is  $\bar{X} = 3.38$ , while the average score for formal education skills is 3.87, and the integration of both skills has an average score of 3.63. This result shows that the teacher candidates' formal and integration education skills are high, while their non-formal education skills are at a moderate level.

The t-test analysis results comparing the professional competencies and formal/non-formal education skill levels of foreign language teacher candidates by gender are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 4**

*Comparison of Professional Competency Levels of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates by Gender*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Teaching Methods	Female	147	3,42	0,88	1,50	0,13
	Male	126	3,26	0,82		
Classroom Management	Female	147	3,77	1,07	2,00	0,05
	Male	126	3,51	1,08		
Student Participation	Female	147	4,00	0,72	3,41	0,00
	Male	126	3,68	0,84		
Professional Competencies	Female	147	3,73	0,67	2,99	0,00
	Male	126	3,48	0,68		

According to the findings in Table 4, the competency levels of foreign language teacher candidates in using teaching methods do not show significant differences according to gender ( $p>0.05$ ). However, participants' competencies in class management, student participation, and overall professional competencies (total) show significant differences based on gender ( $p<0.05$ ). When examining the arithmetic mean values, it is observed that female foreign language teacher candidates have higher competencies in class management, student participation, and overall professional competencies compared to their male counterparts.

**Table 5**

*Comparison of Professional Competency Levels of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates According to Gender*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P
Non_formal	Female	147	3,23	0,70	-3,71	0,00
	Male	126	3,55	0,75		
Formal	Female	147	3,93	0,79	1,16	0,25

	Male	126	3,81	0,80		
Integration	Female	147	3,59	0,55	-1,30	0,20
	Male	126	3,68	0,68		

According to the findings in Table 5, there are no significant differences in foreign language teacher candidates' formal education skills and integration skills based on gender ( $p>0.05$ ), while there are significant differences in non-formal education skills based on gender ( $p<0.05$ ). When examining the arithmetic mean values, it can be seen that male foreign language teacher candidates have higher non-formal education skills than their female peers. The results of the F-test analysis regarding the comparison of professional competencies and formal/non-formal education skill levels of foreign language teacher candidates based on class level are presented in Table 6 and Table 7.

**Table 6**

*Comparison of Professional Competency Levels of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates Based on Class Level*

	Class Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
Teaching Methods	1	63	3,18	0,84	2,112	0,099
	2	104	3,29	0,89		
	3	49	3,48	0,79		
	4	57	3,51	0,82		
Classroom Management	1	63	3,22	1,26	7,083	0,000
	2	104	3,58	1,11		
	3	49	3,94	0,75		
	4	57	4,00	0,85		
Student Participation	1	63	3,66	0,91	1,877	0,134
	2	104	3,89	0,76		
	3	49	3,85	0,66		
	4	57	3,99	0,78		
Professional Competencies	1	63	3,35	0,76	6,073	0,001
	2	104	3,59	0,68		
	3	49	3,76	0,52		
	4	57	3,83	0,63		

Based on the findings in Table 6, the proficiency levels of foreign language teacher candidates in using teaching methods and classroom management do not show significant differences based on class level ( $p>0.05$ ). However, the participants' proficiency in student participation and overall professional competencies (total) show significant differences according to class level ( $p<0.05$ ). According to Scheffe test analyses, foreign language teacher candidates in the third and fourth years have higher proficiency in ensuring student participation and overall professional competencies compared to those in the lower years (1st and 2nd).

**Table 7**

*Comparison of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates' Non-formal, Formal, and Integration Education Skills According to Their Grade Level.*

	Class Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p
Non_formal	1	63	3,14	0,73	4,244	0,006
	2	104	3,38	0,72		
	3	49	3,39	0,76		
	4	57	3,61	0,72		
Formal	1	63	3,72	0,91	1,632	0,182
	2	104	3,85	0,82		
	3	49	4,01	0,71		
	4	57	3,98	0,68		
Integration	1	63	3,43	0,67	4,204	0,006
	2	104	3,62	0,62		
	3	49	3,73	0,43		
	4	57	3,79	0,60		

According to the findings in Table 7, foreign language teacher candidates' formal education skills do not show significant differences based on grade level ( $p>0.05$ ), while their non-formal and integration education skills show significant differences based on grade level ( $p<0.05$ ). According to the Scheffe test analysis, foreign language teacher candidates in the second, third, and fourth years have higher non-formal and integration education skills compared to those in the first year. The regression analysis table showing the relationship between foreign language teacher

candidates' professional competence and formal/non-formal education skill levels is presented in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*The Predictive Level of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates' Non-formal and Formal Education Skills on Their Teaching Professional Competencies*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	$\beta$	Std. Error	B		
(Constant)	2,25	0,23		9,75	0,00
Non-formal Education	0,10	0,06	0,11	1,76	0,08
Formal Education	0,27	0,05	0,31	5,22	0,00
R= 0,358; R <sup>2</sup> = 0,128; F=19,78, p<0,05)					

The results of the regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of non-formal and formal education skills on professional competencies of foreign language teacher candidates are presented in Table 8. According to the findings in Table 8, the linear regression model between the variables is found to be significant (F=19.78; p<0.05). Non-formal and formal education skills explain approximately 12.8% of the variance in overall professional competencies at a significant level. Furthermore, when looking at the beta ( $\beta$ ) values, it is observed that only formal education skills significantly and strongly influence foreign language professional competencies.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the formal and non-formal educational skills and professional competencies of foreign language teacher candidates in Kazakhstan. Considering the increasing importance of combining theoretical knowledge with applied skills in teacher education, understanding how these two dimensions—formal and non-formal learning—interact is essential for improving training processes. The findings of the study contribute to the literature by providing an integrated perspective on how diverse educational experiences shape teacher candidates' professional development. In the following sections, the findings obtained from each sub-problem

are discussed in detail by comparing them with previous research and interpreting their implications for teacher education programs.

In the study, the first focus was on examining the overall professional competencies and formal and non-formal educational skills of the foreign language teacher candidates. The findings indicate that the candidates demonstrate a generally high level of professional competence, particularly in aspects related to teaching methods, classroom management, and student engagement. Among the three skill domains assessed, formal education skills emerged as the most prominent and systematically developed. In contrast, non-formal education skills were found to be at a moderate level, suggesting that candidates' participation in extracurricular and experiential learning environments remains limited. This imbalance may reflect the structure of teacher education curricula, which often prioritizes formal academic components over non-formal practices (Capaldi & Ceccherelli, 2019; Lipuma & Cristo, 2022). The integration skills, positioned between formal and non-formal domains, showed relatively consistent performance among candidates, which may point to an emerging awareness of the need to combine different modes of learning. These findings align with previous research highlighting that structured, curriculum-based environments significantly support professional development (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tudor, 2013; Bloom & Gascoigne, 2017). Meanwhile, the moderate performance in non-formal dimensions confirms the argument that experiential learning environments—such as community-based projects, online discussion platforms, and informal workshops—are still underutilized in many institutions (Brebera, 2018; Enríquez, 2017). Nevertheless, the literature emphasizes that when these non-formal environments are strategically integrated with formal instruction, they foster learner autonomy, digital literacy, and cross-cultural communication skills (Ashraf et al., 2022; Garner et al., 2014; Gokiart et al., 2021). In this context, the study's results reinforce the argument that while formal education remains the backbone of professional training, non-formal education offers significant complementary benefits that should not be overlooked. A balanced and intentional integration of these modalities is essential for equipping future educators with the dynamic competencies required in modern classrooms.

In the study, secondly, gender-based differences in professional competence were also examined. The findings revealed that female teacher candidates outperformed their male counterparts in sub-dimensions such as classroom management, student engagement, and overall professional

competence, although no significant difference was observed in the use of teaching methods. This suggests that female candidates may benefit from stronger empathy, communication, and organizational skills—attributes that are frequently emphasized in gender-related educational research (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Bloom & Gascoigne, 2017). The literature consistently reports that women in teacher education tend to excel in classroom climate, student-centered practices, and behavioral regulation, which supports the current findings (Capaldi & Ceccherelli, 2019; Harfitt & Chow, 2020). Moreover, studies such as Chan (2023) and Diković & Plavšić (2015) emphasize that while formal instructional competencies do not significantly differ by gender, female candidates are more effective in relational and interactive dimensions of classroom practice. This aligns with the current study's results, which indicate that gender-related pedagogical roles may shape candidates' professional performance, particularly in dimensions requiring emotional intelligence and student rapport. The observed higher scores among female candidates in classroom engagement and overall competence further reflect this influence. The finding that teaching method competencies do not differ significantly between genders is consistent with previous research that positions such skills as more curriculum-bound and training-dependent, thus less sensitive to personal or gender-based traits (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Taken together, these results highlight the need to design teacher education programs that not only promote technical teaching abilities across all candidates but also recognize and nurture gender-informed strengths in interpersonal aspects of instruction. They also point to the value of differentiated support strategies in classroom management and engagement practices for both male and female candidates.

The third aspect of the study examined how gender influences formal and non-formal foreign language education skills among teacher candidates. According to the findings, there were no significant gender-based differences in formal education skills, while male candidates scored significantly higher in non-formal education skills. This indicates that male candidates may be more comfortable with flexible, informal learning environments and more inclined to engage in extracurricular and community-based learning opportunities. Previous research has similarly reported that male teacher candidates often participate more actively in non-formal educational experiences, especially in digital, independent, or peer-led learning activities (Eaton, 2010; Diković & Plavšić, 2015). These findings are supported by literature indicating that the differences in non-formal engagement may stem from gender-related preferences and sociocultural



expectations. For instance, Capaldi and Ceccherelli (2019) suggest that male candidates often seek environments that allow more autonomy, while female candidates tend to excel in structured, curriculum-bound tasks. Moreover, Gardner et al. (2014) emphasize that gender influences students' perceptions of autonomy and self-regulation, which can shape their comfort in informal settings. Despite having similar formal education performance, the difference in non-formal engagement highlights a pedagogical gap that may affect the overall balance of competencies. Additionally, Bloom and Gascoigne (2017) emphasize that non-formal learning often requires candidates to initiate and manage learning experiences, which may align more with male students' perceived educational agency in certain cultural contexts. This is echoed in the findings of Chan (2023), who found that non-formal activities, such as online forums, peer tutoring, and project-based events, tend to attract male participation at higher rates in Central Asian education systems. However, this does not suggest a deficit among female candidates but rather calls for more inclusive and guided exposure to non-formal opportunities throughout the teacher training process. These findings suggest that teacher education programs should develop strategies that promote equal participation in non-formal experiences across genders, for instance, by integrating such activities more systematically into formal course requirements. Doing so would help ensure that all candidates benefit from the full range of learning environments necessary for developing adaptive, real-world teaching competencies.

In the study, fourthly, the relationship between academic grade level and professional competence among teacher candidates was examined. The findings indicated that candidates in the third and fourth years of their studies displayed significantly higher levels of professional competence, particularly in sub-dimensions such as student engagement and classroom management. These differences are interpreted as the result of accumulated academic and practical experience over time. While early-year students are still becoming familiar with theoretical foundations, upper-year candidates appear to benefit from practicum courses and applied instructional contexts, which contribute positively to their competence. This trend has been supported by various studies emphasizing the role of sustained exposure to teaching practice in developing pedagogical proficiency (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Harfitt & Chow, 2020). Moreover, curriculum design in the later years of teacher education typically incorporates a greater variety of experiential learning components, such as school-based projects and practicum-based mentoring, which are closely associated with enhanced student engagement skills (Chan, 2023). Halilov (2024) similarly notes

that vertical progression in teacher education fosters a deeper internalization of pedagogical roles and classroom dynamics. Hacıyeva (2024) further emphasizes that fourth-year students often internalize feedback mechanisms more effectively, thus refining their teaching practices. The findings confirm these developmental trajectories and suggest that year-by-year progression in teacher training is not merely linear but accumulative in nature, integrating theoretical knowledge with reflective and experiential learning processes. As also reported in previous studies, practicum experiences in the later stages of education significantly enhance candidates' classroom management, student engagement, and general pedagogical skills (Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Harfitt & Chow, 2020; Chan, 2023), confirming the higher competence levels observed in senior candidates.

The fifth research question of the study concerned the examination of whether formal, non-formal, and integration skills varied by academic grade level. The findings showed no significant difference in formal education skills across grade levels, whereas non-formal and integration skills increased significantly with academic seniority. This suggests that while candidates tend to acquire formal education skills consistently through structured coursework, their development in non-formal and integrative competencies appears to be more experience-dependent. As candidates progress through their training, they are exposed to more extracurricular activities, community-based projects, and practicum settings, which contribute to their growth in these domains. This upward trend in integration and non-formal skill development aligns with previous findings suggesting that real-world practice and applied learning environments foster these competencies more effectively than formal curricula alone (Brebera, 2018; Gokiart et al., 2021). The literature emphasizes that integration skills, such as connecting classroom learning with broader social contexts or utilizing digital tools in informal learning environments, are not automatically acquired but develop over time through guided experience (Traxler et al., 2015; Harfitt & Chow, 2020). The findings of the study support this view and show that senior students benefit from greater involvement in voluntary projects, language clubs, or blended learning activities - spaces where formal and non-formal boundaries merge. These patterns suggest that teacher education programs should scaffold non-formal engagement from early years onward, ensuring gradual exposure and reflective support throughout the academic journey (Ashraf et al., 2022; Vaculíková et al., 2023). Although formal education competencies are foundational, the increasing trajectory of non-formal and integration skills with grade level confirms that practice-oriented learning remains essential

for well-rounded professional development. These findings highlight the importance of intentional curriculum planning that integrates community engagement, experiential learning, and digital fluency across all academic levels.

The final research question examined the extent to which formal and non-formal education skills predict the professional competencies of foreign language teacher candidates. According to the regression analysis, both skill types together explained approximately 12.8% of the variance in professional competence. However, when examining the beta coefficients, only formal education skills emerged as a statistically significant and strong predictor. This finding confirms that structured instructional processes and curriculum-based training play a primary role in shaping teacher candidates' professional development. Studies by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) and Chan (2023) also emphasize that the foundational elements of formal education - such as lesson planning, assessment design, and theoretical grounding - have a more direct and measurable impact on professional skills. In contrast, non-formal education skills, although important, were found to have a more limited predictive value. This supports prior research indicating that non-formal experiences, while beneficial for developing creativity and learner autonomy, may not independently explain professional competence without being reinforced by formal instruction (Capaldi & Ceccherelli, 2019; Brebera, 2018). The findings align with the view that non-formal learning plays a complementary, rather than primary, role in competency development. This distinction is important for curriculum design in teacher education programs, which often overemphasize formal instruction while treating non-formal engagement as optional. The results suggest a need to reconsider how both types of learning can be better integrated. As Vaculíková et al. (2023) argue, non-formal learning should be systematically supported through reflection, feedback, and alignment with pedagogical goals. Doing so may enhance its predictive power and reinforce the holistic development of professional competence. In sum, while formal education remains the backbone of competence acquisition, non-formal approaches serve as meaningful extensions that enrich professional preparation when appropriately scaffolded and aligned with institutional objectives.

The findings of the study suggest the necessity of a multidimensional approach to developing both the academic and practical skills of teacher candidates. This may provide an important basis for revising educational policies and curriculum frameworks (Chan, 2023). The results also

underscore the need to consider demographic factors, such as gender and grade level, in the professional development of teacher candidates. In line with theoretical perspectives in the literature, the integration model has been shown to provide tangible contributions to the professional competencies of candidates (Brebera, 2018). From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that teacher education programs should become more flexible and practice-oriented. The dominant influence of formal education skills on professional competence has significant implications for applied teaching. These results suggest that interactive and experiential learning environments should be more prominent in the education of teacher candidates. The findings also reveal that improvements in sub-dimensions, such as classroom management and student engagement, are supported by extracurricular activities. This indicates that educational programs should focus not only on theoretical knowledge but also on practical experiences. Lastly, the findings show that teacher training institutions should provide more support for candidates in areas such as digital pedagogical skills and community-based practices (Harfitt & Chow, 2020). In this context, the development of practice-oriented educational models will enable pre-service teachers to respond more effectively to the challenges they may encounter in their future professional lives.

Although this study provides significant findings regarding the professional competencies and instructional skills of pre-service teachers, it also presents certain limitations. The research was conducted with a limited sample consisting only of specific universities in Kazakhstan, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Since the study is based on a descriptive survey model, it is difficult to establish definitive cause-and-effect relationships. Additionally, the data collection tools relied on self-reported measures, which may involve a risk of bias in participants' responses. The cross-sectional design of the study also prevents the observation of changes over time. Although the reliability and validity of the instruments used in the study were tested, similar studies in different cultural contexts are needed (Brebera, 2018). The study, conducted within a limited timeframe and with limited resources, should be replicated with larger sample groups to strengthen its findings. Moreover, the quantitative analysis methods employed may not fully reflect the in-depth experiences of the participants. Therefore, future research should include mixed-methods approaches supported by qualitative data.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study provides a comprehensive view of how formal and non-formal foreign language education skills relate to the professional competencies of teacher candidates. It highlights the predominance of formal education in shaping competence, while also emphasizing the supportive role of non-formal learning in areas such as student engagement and flexibility. The study brings attention to significant differences related to gender and academic grade level, offering context-specific insights that can inform teacher education practices. As previously discussed, the study's scope and methodological design present certain limitations, which future research should address through broader samples and longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches. Based on the findings, it is recommended that teacher education programs adopt more integrated and practice-oriented models, encouraging equitable engagement in diverse learning environments and responding to the evolving demands of the teaching profession.

## **Recommendations**

Considering the limitations of the study, it is recommended that future research be conducted on larger sample groups. The professional competencies of pre-service teachers should be supported through more comprehensive and longitudinal studies. In the future, the use of mixed-methods research designs that combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches will allow for a deeper exploration of candidates' experiences. Additionally, data obtained from different countries and cultural contexts will increase the generalizability of the findings. The relationship between formal and non-formal educational strategies used in teacher education programs and various demographic factors should be examined in detail. Researchers may test interventions aimed at improving pre-service teachers' digital pedagogical skills and evaluate the effects of these interventions on their professional competencies. It is important for educational institutions to develop strategies that enrich practical experiences and internship programs for candidates. Furthermore, experimental studies should be conducted on the impact of seminars, workshops, and hands-on projects designed to enhance candidates' non-formal educational skills. These studies will strengthen candidates' integration into applied learning processes. Future studies should also investigate the effects of variables, such as gender and class level, in greater detail. Case studies should be carried out to explore how professional competencies can be developed through practical

training and the use of digital tools. In conclusion, these recommendations serve as a guide for making teacher education programs more effective and encourage the implementation of studies that will contribute to the literature. Additionally, the long-term effects of experiences gained during internships and practicum courses should be examined. In practice, it is essential to measure the impact of real-time interventions in the educational processes of teacher candidates through collaborations with teacher training institutions.

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