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THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL MEDIA-BASED INSTRUCTION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AMONG SENIOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

Abstract

Digital media can offer English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners authentic language input and meaningful opportunities for communication. However, empirical evidence on the effect of digital media-based instruction on the communicative competence of senior school students remains limited. This study examined whether the systematic integration of digital media materials into English-language instruction was associated with greater short-term gains in foreign language communicative competence among Grade 10 learners than regular instruction alone. A quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test design with a non-equivalent comparison group was used. The participants were 26 Grade 10 EFL learners from a gymnasium in Almaty, Kazakhstan, divided into an experimental group ($n = 13$) and a comparison group ($n = 13$). Over four weeks, the experimental group studied English through lessons systematically built around digital media materials, including online news reports, short videos, interviews, podcasts, and online articles. The comparison group followed the same curriculum through regular textbook-based instruction. Communicative competence was assessed through listening, reading, speaking, and writing tasks before and after the intervention. Both groups improved, but the experimental group demonstrated a larger overall gain. The greatest improvement occurred in listening and speaking, while reading and writing improved more moderately. Given the small sample, non-random assignment, short intervention period, and single-school setting, the findings provide preliminary evidence of the short-term potential of digital media-based instruction rather than definitive evidence of a causal or long-term effect.

Key words: digital media, media-based instruction, foreign language communicative competence, EFL, senior school students, English language teaching, quasi-experimental study.

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ЦИФРЛЫҚ АҚПАРАТ ҚҰРАЛДАРЫНА НЕГІЗДЕЛГЕН ОҚЫТУДЫҢ ЖОҒАРЫ СЫНЫП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ ШЕТЕЛТІЛДІК КОММУНИКАТИВТІК ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІНІҢ ДАМУЫНА ӘСЕРІ

Аңдатпа

Цифрлық медиа ағылшын тілін шетел тілі ретінде оқитын студенттерге шынайы тілдік материалды және нақты қарым-қатынас мүмкіндіктерін ұсына алады. Дегенмен, жоғары сынып оқушыларының шеттілдік коммуникативтік құзыреттілігіне цифрлық медианы пайдалана отырып оқытудың әсері туралы эмпирикалық деректер әлі де шектеулі. Бұл зерттеу цифрлық медиа материалдарын ағылшын тілін оқыту процесіне жүйелі түрде енгізу әдеттегідей оқытумен салыстырғанда 10-сынып оқушыларының коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін неғұрлым қысқа мерзімді жақсартуға әкелетіні туралы гипотезаны тексерді.

Квази-эксперименттік дизайн алдын-ала және қорытынды тестілеумен және эквивалентті емес бақылау тобымен қолданылды. Алматыдағы (Қазақстан) мектеп-гимназиядан ағылшын тілін шетел тілі ретінде оқитын 10-сыныптың 26 оқушысы қатысты, олар эксперименттік топқа ($N = 13$) және бақылау тобына ($n = 13$) бөлінді. Төрт апта бойы эксперименттік топтың студенттері онлайн жаңалықтар, қысқа бейнелер, сұхбаттар, подкасттар және онлайн мақалаларды қоса алғанда, цифрлық медиа материалдарына негізделген сабақтарда ағылшын тілін үйренді. Бақылау тобының оқушылары оқулықтар бойынша дәстүрлі оқыту шеңберінде сол оқу бағдарламасынан өтті. Коммуникативті құзыреттілік экспериментке дейін және одан кейін тыңдау, оқу, сөйлеу және жазу тапсырмалары арқылы бағаланды. Екі топта да білім деңгейі жақсарды, дегенмен эксперименттік топ айтарлықтай жалпы прогреске қол жеткізді. Тыңдау мен сөйлеуде ең үлкен прогресс байқалды, ал оқу мен жазу аз дәрежеде жақсарды. Шағын үлгіні, кездейсоқ емес қатысушыларды таңдауды, эксперименттің қысқа мерзімін және бір мектепте зерттеуді ескере отырып, нәтижелер себеп-салдарлық байланыстың немесе ұзақ мерзімді әсердің түпкілікті дәлелдерінен гөрі цифрлық медианы пайдалана отырып, қысқа мерзімді оқыту әлеуетінің алдын ала дәлелдерін береді.

Кілт сөздер: цифрлық медиа, медиаға бағытталған оқыту, шеттілдік коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, ағылшын тілі шетел тілі ретінде, жоғары сынып оқушылары, ағылшын тілін оқыту, квази-эксперименттік зерттеу.

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ВЛИЯНИЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ НА ОСНОВЕ ЦИФРОВЫХ МЕДИА НА РАЗВИТИЕ ИНОЯЗЫЧНОЙ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ У УЧАЩИХСЯ СТАРШИХ КЛАССОВ

Аннотация

Цифровые медиа могут предоставить учащимся, изучающим английский как иностранный язык, аутентичный языковой материал и реальные возможности для общения. Однако эмпирические данные о влиянии обучения с использованием цифровых медиа на коммуникативную компетенцию учащихся старших классов по-прежнему ограничены. В данном исследовании изучался вопрос о том, приводит ли систематическое внедрение материалов цифровых медиа в процесс преподавания английского языка к более значительным краткосрочным улучшениям коммуникативной компетенции в иностранном языке у учащихся 10-го класса по сравнению с привычным процессом обучения без использования таких материалов. Использовался квазиэкспериментальный дизайн «до-тест – после-тест» с неэквивалентной контрольной группой. Участниками стали 26 учащихся 10-го класса, изучающих английский как иностранный, из школы-гимназии в Алматы (Казахстан), которые были разделены на экспериментальную группу ($n = 13$) и контрольную группу ($n = 13$). В течение четырёх недель учащиеся экспериментальной группы изучали английский язык на уроках, систематически построенных на основе материалов цифровых медиа, включая онлайн-новости, короткие видеоролики, интервью, подкасты и онлайн-статьи. Учащиеся контрольной группы проходили ту же учебную программу в рамках привычного обучения по учебникам. Коммуникативная компетенция оценивалась с помощью заданий на аудирование, чтение, говорение и письмо до и после проведения эксперимента. Обе группы продемонстрировали улучшение результатов, однако экспериментальная группа показала более значительный общий прогресс.

Наибольший прогресс был отмечен в навыках аудирования и говорения, тогда как навыки чтения и письма улучшились в меньшей степени. Учитывая небольшую выборку, неслучайное распределение участников, короткий период обучения и проведение исследования в рамках одной школы, полученные результаты дают предварительные свидетельства краткосрочного потенциала обучения с использованием цифровых медиа, а не являются окончательным доказательством причинно-следственной связи или долгосрочного эффекта.

Ключевые слова: цифровые медиа, медиа-ориентированное обучение, коммуникативная компетенция в иностранном языке, английский как иностранный язык, учащиеся старших классов, преподавание английского языка, квази-экспериментальное исследование.

Introduction

Communicative competence is a central aim of foreign language education because learners need not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to use English appropriately in real communicative situations. Contemporary language classrooms increasingly draw on media resources, which give learners access to authentic language, multimodal content, and topics that can stimulate discussion and interaction. In this sense, media texts can serve not merely as sources of information but as materials for communicative language learning.

Previous research has shown that media and digital technologies may support the development of listening, speaking, vocabulary, and interactional skills. Media-based instruction can expose learners to language in context, combine visual and auditory input, and create opportunities for learners to interpret, discuss, and respond to meaningful content. At the same time, studies differ considerably in how they define and measure communicative competence. Some focus on separate language skills, while others include pragmatic, sociocultural, interactive, or strategic dimensions. In addition, much of the experimental evidence has been obtained with university students, whereas studies involving secondary-school learners more often examine perceptions, media habits, motivation, or self-efficacy rather than direct changes in communicative performance.

This gap is particularly relevant for senior school students, who are expected to move beyond basic language reproduction and use English to understand information, express opinions, and participate in discussion. The present study therefore examined whether systematic integration of digital media materials into English lessons was associated with greater short-term gains in communicative competence among Grade 10 EFL learners than regular instruction alone. In this study, “digital media” refers to online news reports, short videos, interviews, podcasts, online articles, and other multimodal English-language materials used in digital format. The term “mass media” is used only when referring to the broader media environment from which such digital materials derive.

Literature Review

Foreign language communicative competence refers to learners’ ability to use a foreign language effectively and appropriately in meaningful communication. Models of communicative competence generally emphasize that successful communication requires more than grammatical accuracy; it also involves discourse organization, sociolinguistic appropriateness, and strategic language use (Mart, 2018). However, researchers operationalize the construct differently. Some studies assess individual skills such as listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, or pronunciation, while others include pragmatic, intercultural, interactional, or strategic abilities (Baimakhan et al., 2024; Bushi, 2021; Oryngali, 2025). Several empirical studies also rely on researcher-designed tests, rubrics, or perception-based measures without clearly linking them to an established competence model (Cabana-Basilan & Entimano, 2026; Khlyzova, 2019).

This inconsistency matters because the effectiveness of media-based instruction should be judged through learners’ communicative performance rather than through media exposure or

learner perceptions alone. In the present study, communicative competence was operationalized as learners' ability to comprehend and produce spoken and written English in meaningful communicative situations. The assessment focused on four observable performance areas: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, and writing. Speaking and writing were evaluated through analytic rubrics assessing fluency, coherence, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, communicative appropriateness, and task fulfillment. Although this operationalization does not capture every dimension of communicative competence, such as intercultural or strategic competence, it provides a measurable classroom-based approximation appropriate for a short-term school intervention.

Media resources have long been considered valuable in language education because they provide linguistic, cultural, and communicative input beyond conventional textbooks. Studies have examined films, video, news, radio, podcasts, websites, and other media texts in relation to language skills, vocabulary development, intercultural awareness, and communication (Bush, 2021; Gregori Signes, 2001; Khamrabaeva, 2023). Yet the pedagogical potential of media does not automatically demonstrate its effectiveness. Much of the literature remains conceptual or descriptive, proposing media-based activities without experimentally testing their influence on communicative competence (Gregori Signes, 2001; Rubtsova & Devdariani, 2021).

Empirical research generally suggests positive effects of media-supported language learning, although the strength of the evidence varies by educational level, research design, and outcome measure. Studies involving secondary-school learners have mainly explored perceptions, learning effort, self-efficacy, or related outcomes rather than measuring communicative competence directly (Cabana-Basilan & Entimano, 2026; Genç & Köksal, 2021; Shen & Li, 2024). More direct evidence comes from intervention studies with university students. Khlyzova (2019) reported differences between experimental and control groups after media-oriented instruction, while Oryngali (2025) found improvement following a pre-/post-intervention design. Mukhanbetbekkyzy and Kunakova (2025) likewise examined mass-media-based instruction using experimental and comparison groups. However, these studies focused on university learners, and their assessment procedures often lacked detailed reliability and validity evidence.

Thus, there is insufficient evidence combining senior school learners, a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with a comparison group, and direct assessment of communicative performance within digital media-based instruction. The present study addresses this gap by examining the effect of systematically integrated digital media materials on the communicative competence of Grade 10 EFL learners.

Research design and participants

The study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test design with a non-equivalent comparison group. It was conducted at School-Gymnasium No. 86 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and involved 26 Grade 10 EFL learners aged approximately 15–16 years. The students belonged to one Grade 10 class that was already divided into two English-language instructional groups of 13 students each. One group was designated as the experimental group (EG, $n = 13$), and the other as the comparison group (CG, $n = 13$). Because the groups were pre-existing instructional groups, individual random assignment was not possible.

Both groups followed the same general English curriculum and participated in the study for four weeks. Before the intervention, the groups were compared on their pre-test total and component scores to assess their initial comparability. No statistically significant between-group differences were found for listening ($U = 100.00$, $p = .438$), reading ($U = 99.50$, $p = .453$), speaking ($U = 100.50$, $p = .423$), writing ($U = 106.50$, $p = .266$), or total scores ($U = 101.50$, $p = .397$). The experimental group had a mean pre-test total score of 55.46 ($SD = 8.71$), compared with 52.38 ($SD = 8.45$) for the comparison group. Therefore, the groups were considered broadly comparable at baseline.

Intervention

The intervention lasted four weeks and consisted of 12 English lessons per week, with each lesson lasting 45 minutes. In total, the experimental group received 10 media-based lessons during the intervention period. All lessons were delivered face-to-face in the regular classroom. The experimental group was taught by the researcher, while the comparison group was taught by the English teacher who normally taught that group. Both groups studied equivalent curriculum topics during the intervention period.

The experimental group received instruction in which digital mass-media materials were systematically integrated into regular lesson procedures. The materials included online news reports, short news videos, interviews, podcasts, online articles, and other authentic or adapted multimodal texts in English. Materials were selected according to their relevance to Grade 10 learners, linguistic accessibility at approximately B1 level, connection to curriculum topics, and potential to generate communicative interaction.

Each media-based lesson followed a consistent structure. Lessons began with pre-viewing or pre-reading activities designed to activate learners' background knowledge and introduce key vocabulary. Learners then completed comprehension tasks based on the selected media text. This was followed by post-viewing or post-reading communicative activities, such as pair and group discussions, information exchange, opinion sharing, summarizing, role-play, and short written responses. Each lesson ended with a productive speaking or writing task connected to the media content.

The comparison group studied the same curriculum content through regular textbook-based instruction and conventional classroom activities without the systematic use of digital media materials. Intervention fidelity was monitored through lesson plans, teacher logs, and classroom observations. These records were used to verify that the planned instructional procedures were implemented throughout the four-week intervention.

Assessment instrument

Foreign language communicative competence was measured using researcher-developed parallel pre-test and post-test assessments. Each assessment consisted of four components: listening (20 points), reading (20 points), speaking (30 points), and writing (30 points), yielding a maximum total score of 100 points. The listening and reading components each consisted of 10 test items, with each item worth 2 points. Thus, each receptive skill had a maximum score of 20 points. These tasks assessed learners' comprehension of main ideas, specific information, and language in context. Speaking and writing were assessed using analytic scoring rubrics, each comprising five criteria rated on a six-point scale from 0 to 6. Each productive skill had a maximum score of 30 points. The speaking rubric assessed fluency, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and communicative appropriateness. The writing rubric assessed content and communicative effectiveness, organization and coherence, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and appropriate language use.

The assessment was developed with reference to B1-level CEFR communicative descriptors and adapted to the learners' age and educational context. The assessment materials were reviewed by two experienced EFL teachers, who evaluated the alignment of the tasks with the intended construct, the appropriateness of the language level, the clarity of the instructions, and the suitability of the scoring criteria. In addition, three teacher colleagues reviewed the materials and provided feedback on task clarity and suitability. Before the main study, the assessment was piloted with four students from a different class who did not participate in the intervention. Feedback from the expert review and pilot testing was used to identify and address potential problems with task instructions and assessment procedures.

Speaking and writing performances were independently scored by two trained raters using the analytic rubrics. Before scoring, the raters participated in a calibration session and practiced scoring sample responses. Inter-rater reliability was to be examined using the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for total rubric scores. Any disagreements between the raters were resolved through discussion.

The pre-test and post-test were designed as parallel forms. They had the same structure, task types, point allocation, and scoring criteria, but used different texts and tasks of approximately equivalent difficulty.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, medians, and score ranges, were calculated for the pre-test, post-test, and gain scores for both groups. Gain scores were calculated by subtracting each participant's pre-test score from their post-test score.

The normality of the score distributions was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test and visual inspection of histograms and Q–Q plots. Given the small sample size and the non-randomized nature of the study, non-parametric tests were used as the primary inferential analyses.

Within-group changes from pre-test to post-test were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. Between-group differences in gain scores were examined using the Mann–Whitney U test. Effect sizes were reported as rank-biserial correlations.

As a supplementary analysis, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted with the post-test total score as the dependent variable, group as the fixed factor, and pre-test total score as the covariate. The assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was examined by testing the interaction between group and pre-test total score. The interaction was not statistically significant ($p = .165$), supporting the use of the ANCOVA model.

Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Exact p-values were reported to three decimal places, while values below .001 were reported as $p < .001$.

Results

Before the intervention, the experimental and comparison groups demonstrated broadly similar overall performance. The experimental group obtained a mean pre-test score of 55.46%, while the comparison group obtained 52.38%. After the four-week intervention, the experimental group's mean score increased to 61.77%, whereas the comparison group's mean score increased to 53.69%. Thus, the experimental group improved by 6.31 percentage points, compared with 1.31 percentage points in the comparison group.

Table 1. Overall pre-test and post-test performance

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement
Experimental group	55.46%	61.77%	+6.31 pp
Comparison group	52.38%	53.69%	+1.31 pp

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's total score ($W = 0$, $p < .001$). The comparison group also demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in total scores ($W = 0$, $p < .001$). The Mann–Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference between the groups in gain scores ($U = 169.00$, $p < .001$), with all experimental-group gain scores exceeding those of the comparison group.

The supplementary ANCOVA, controlling for pre-test performance, indicated a statistically significant effect of group on post-test total scores ($p < .001$). These results suggest that the experimental group demonstrated greater short-term gains in overall communicative performance than the comparison group during the intervention period.

At the component level, the experimental group improved in all four areas. As shown in Table 2, the largest gain was observed in listening, which increased from 65.77% to 75.00%, a rise of 9.23 percentage points. Speaking increased from 50.77% to 58.72%, or by 7.95 percentage points. Reading improved from 63.85% to 68.85%, and writing increased from 47.69% to 51.28%.

The comparison group showed smaller changes across all components. Its largest gain was in reading, which increased by 3.85 percentage points, while changes in listening, speaking, and writing were relatively limited.

Table 2. Changes in individual communicative competence components

Component	Pre-test (EG)	Post-test (EG)	EG Improvement	Pre-test (CG)	Post-test (CG)	CG Improvement
Listening	65.77%	75.00%	+9.23 pp	62.31%	63.85%	+1.54 pp
Reading	63.85%	68.85%	+5.00 pp	60.77%	64.62%	+3.85 pp
Speaking	50.77%	58.72%	+7.95 pp	48.21%	48.72%	+0.51 pp
Writing	47.69%	51.28%	+3.59 pp	44.36%	44.62%	+0.26 pp

Overall, the experimental group demonstrated greater short-term improvement in communicative performance than the comparison group. However, given the small sample, non-random assignment, and short duration of the intervention, these findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of an association between the intervention and short-term gains rather than as definitive evidence of causality.

Discussion

The findings indicate that four weeks of digital media-based instruction were associated with greater improvement in foreign language communicative performance than regular instruction alone. Although both groups made some progress, the experimental group showed a larger overall gain and more noticeable improvement in listening and speaking. Given the quasi-experimental design, these results do not permit strong causal inference. Nevertheless, the combination of a comparison group, pre-test measurement, and a statistically significant difference in gain scores provides preliminary evidence that systematically integrated digital media materials may have contributed to the observed short-term improvement.

The stronger gains in listening and speaking may be related to the audiovisual and interactive nature of the intervention. Digital media materials exposed learners to spoken English supported by visual and contextual information, which may have provided intensive listening practice. In addition, the lessons required learners to discuss media content, exchange information, express opinions, and respond to communicative tasks. These activities likely created more opportunities for oral language use than conventional comprehension exercises. The smaller improvement in writing may reflect the short duration of the intervention, as written communicative ability usually requires more sustained and systematic practice.

The comparison group also improved, which was expected because students continued to receive regular English instruction. However, the substantially larger gain in the experimental group suggests that the observed difference cannot be explained solely by normal classroom learning. The digital media materials appear to have provided additional contextualized input and communicative opportunities that were less prominent in the regular instructional condition.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous research indicating that media-supported and digitally enriched instruction can contribute to language and communication skills (Khlyzova,

2019; Oryngali, 2025; Mukhanbetbekkyzy & Kunakova, 2025). The present study extends this evidence to senior school learners by using a pre-test/post-test comparison design and by assessing four components of communicative performance.

Several limitations should be considered. First, the sample included only 26 Grade 10 students from one school in Almaty, which limits generalizability. Second, the intervention lasted only four weeks, so the sustainability of the observed gains remains unknown. Third, the groups were pre-existing instructional groups rather than randomly assigned groups, and possible differences in motivation, teacher style, classroom climate, or out-of-school media use cannot be excluded. Fourth, the assessment was researcher-developed. Although it was reviewed by experts, piloted, and scored using analytic rubrics, it measured a selected set of communicative performance indicators rather than the full range of communicative competence. Finally, the study did not examine different types of digital media separately, so it cannot determine whether video, podcasts, news texts, or other formats had different effects.

Despite these limitations, the results suggest that digital media materials can be a promising complementary resource in secondary-school English instruction. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, random assignment where feasible, longer interventions, delayed post-tests, and validated multidimensional measures of communicative competence. Future studies should also compare the effects of different media types on specific components of communicative competence.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of digital media-based instruction on the short-term development of foreign language communicative competence among Grade 10 EFL learners. Both groups improved during the four-week period, but the experimental group demonstrated a greater overall gain, particularly in listening and speaking. The findings provide preliminary evidence that the systematic integration of digital media materials can complement regular English instruction by offering contextualized language input and additional opportunities for communicative language use.

Nevertheless, the small sample, non-random assignment, single-school setting, short intervention period, and use of a researcher-developed assessment limit the generalizability and causal interpretation of the findings. Further research should examine the effects of digital media-based instruction over longer periods, with larger and more diverse samples, delayed post-tests, and more comprehensive measures of communicative competence.

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