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Assessing the Practice of Developing Students' Soft Skills in Essay Writing during Language Courses

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of implementing a communicative-activity-based methodology for developing students' soft skills through essay writing in school language courses. The focus is on assessing improvements in communication, critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression within the framework of essay composition. The research was conducted in secondary schools in Turkistan, Kazakhstan, with 204 students from grades 10–11. The methodology included an experimental design comparing control and experimental groups, supported by surveys, interviews, practical writing tasks, and qualitative/quantitative analysis. The experimental group was exposed to a specially designed essay-writing model rooted in communicative-activity theory. The Kramer-Welch test was applied for statistical validation of the hypothesis. The results demonstrate a significant increase in the experimental group's soft skills development. 81% of

students in the experimental group could define the essay genre after training (compared to 19% before), and 70% reported increased confidence in written self-expression. Additionally, students' ability to reason, structure ideas, and apply creative strategies showed measurable improvement. The final essays exhibited stronger organization, originality, and linguistic expressiveness. This study offers a validated model for integrating soft skills training into language education via structured essay writing. It contributes to both pedagogical theory and classroom practice by linking genre-based writing tasks with the holistic development of learners' communicative competencies.

Keywords: Soft skills; Essay writing; Communicative-activity approach; Language courses; Secondary education; Writing pedagogy; Student competencies

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

In contemporary educational paradigms, the cultivation of soft skills in students is increasingly recognized as a vital component of holistic development, complementing traditional academic instruction[1]. Soft skills, encompassing interpersonal abilities, communication proficiency, and personal attributes, are essential for success in both academic and professional spheres[2]. The integration of soft skills development into language courses, particularly through essay writing, presents a unique opportunity to equip students with the competencies necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world[3]. The ability to effectively manage oneself and interact constructively with others is paramount in today's interconnected society, underscoring the need for educators to prioritize the development of these skills from an early stage[4]. The ability to master soft skills is necessary for graduates to be effective in their personal and professional lives, making them essential for any job seeker. In the context of the dynamic digital era, educators serve as key facilitators in nurturing essential soft skills in students—such as leadership, teamwork, empathy, and effective communication - that are vital for both personal growth and career advancement[5]. These competencies hold universal value, being relevant across diverse professional settings, job functions, and organizational hierarchies[6]. Effective communication skills are highly valued in customer-oriented industries, which highlights the necessity of improving IT students' communication abilities in preparation for their future jobs[7].

Fostering soft skills in students is a key factor in supporting both their personal development and future professional growth[8]. In modern educational settings, competencies like interpersonal communication, collaboration, and critical problem-solving are gaining significant prominence[9]. In contemporary work environments, success depends not only on technical knowledge but also on the ability to effectively apply these soft skills in practice. Essay writing, as a pedagogical tool, offers a structured platform for students to hone these skills, fostering critical thinking, clear articulation, and persuasive communication[10]. The cultivation of soft skills is recognized as a critical component of professional success, particularly in the field of information technology. Achieving effective outcomes in IT projects often depends on the ability of specialists to collaborate, communicate clearly, and work cohesively as a team to resolve complex issues[11]. Many college graduates, according to human resources managers and directors, do not have adequate soft skills. Therefore, higher education executives should use a variety of strategies to teach soft skills to bridge the gap[12]. The current research explores the ways that language courses use essay writing to develop students' soft skills, with the goal of determining the most effective strategies and difficulties in this area.

The current study seeks to investigate the existing practices in language courses aimed at fostering soft skills through essay writing, identifying both successful approaches and areas for improvement. Specifically, this research will explore how educators integrate soft skills development into the essay writing process, the types of activities and assessments used to evaluate these skills, and the challenges encountered in this endeavor. This research will also address the soft skills gap and the talent management issues that can be addressed by promoting soft skills in students[13]. The integration of technology into education presents a promising avenue for fostering an optimal learning environment, enabling educators to discern and address the

unique strengths and weaknesses of individual learners[14]. The development of soft skills has become increasingly recognized as a crucial aspect of higher education, necessary for equipping students with the competencies required for success in their future careers.

The incorporation of soft skills development into language courses, particularly through essay writing, presents a unique opportunity to equip students with the competencies necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world. Essay writing assignments can be tailored to promote critical thinking, effective communication, and collaborative problem-solving, all of which are highly valued in today's workplaces. Furthermore, the ability to articulate ideas clearly and persuasively through writing is a fundamental skill that transcends disciplinary boundaries and is applicable across a wide range of professional contexts. The traditional focus on content dissemination in STEM education is being re-evaluated to strengthen students' practical skills, laying a foundation for success in the global workplace[15]. Language courses can play a pivotal role in fostering these essential skills, ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Recent research further highlights the pedagogical potential of AI-driven feedback in enhancing students' writing proficiency and engagement. For instance, Chan et al.[16] conducted a large-scale randomized controlled trial involving 918 university students, demonstrating that generative AI feedback significantly improved students' essay revision quality and heightened their motivation and engagement levels. Their mixed-methods approach combining statistical analysis, qualitative surveys, and thematic interviews provides a robust framework for evaluating both cognitive and affective dimensions of writing development. Integrating these findings into the current study underscores the relevance of innovative technological tools in fostering soft skills like communication, self-regulation, and creativity.

The mismatch between the skills acquired by graduates and the demands of the labor market has prompted a re-evaluation of educational practices, with a growing emphasis on the cultivation of soft skills[17]. Higher education institutions are increasingly required to realign their curricula to meet the expectations of external stakeholders, especially by reassessing how academic programs - particularly in the field of management - equip graduates with the competencies

needed for the modern workforce[18]. The World Economic Forum has identified a range of skills that are increasingly in demand, including critical thinking, problem-solving, analytical thinking, and innovation[19]. These skills are essential for navigating complex challenges and adapting to rapidly changing work environments. Moreover, the ability to effectively communicate and collaborate with others is crucial for success in team-based projects and cross-functional collaborations.

The transition from traditional, routine-based tasks to more dynamic, process-oriented activities has further accentuated the need for individuals who can effectively interact with others and solve problems creatively[20]. By integrating activities that promote communication, respect, teamwork, and problem-solving into the curriculum, students can develop necessary skills applicable to their higher education experience. Consequently, educational institutions are tasked with providing students with opportunities to hone these skills, ensuring that they are well-prepared to meet the evolving demands of the global economy. Integrating critical and design thinking into higher education is critical for preparing graduates for future workplace difficulties[21,22]. The ability to engage with other cultures, lifestyles, and religions is a necessity in an increasingly globalized world[23]. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological advancements has created a need for individuals who can adapt quickly to new tools and platforms, learn continuously, and leverage technology to enhance their productivity and creativity.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of soft skills, there remains a gap in understanding the most effective methods for developing these skills within the context of language courses, particularly through essay writing. It is essential to address the shortage of skills among young students as soon as possible. Many instructors may lack the training and resources necessary to design essay assignments that effectively promote soft skills development, or they may not be aware of the specific strategies that can be used to integrate these skills into the writing process[24]. Consequently, students may not be receiving the targeted instruction and feedback needed to improve their soft skills through essay writing[25].

Moreover, there is a need for more research on the effectiveness of different approaches to soft skills development in essay writing. While some studies have explored the impact of specific interventions on students' writing skills, few have examined the extent to which these interventions also contribute to the development of soft skills. Therefore, it is essential to conduct research that specifically investigates the link between essay writing and soft skills development, and that identifies the most effective strategies for maximizing this connection. A more nuanced understanding of the specific factors influencing writing development among undergraduate students, such as varying skill levels, interdisciplinary disparities, and the pervasive influence of technology, is needed to address the current challenges effectively. Additionally, it is important to consider the challenges that students themselves may face in developing soft skills through essay writing. Some students may struggle with the writing process itself, finding it difficult to articulate their ideas clearly and persuasively.

The primary purpose of this study is to assess the current practices of developing students' soft skills through essay writing in language courses. This involves examining the various approaches used by instructors to integrate soft skills development into essay assignments, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with these practices. This study will be guided by the following research questions:

- What changes occur in students' ability to express ideas, structure arguments, and demonstrate creativity after the implementation of the proposed writing model?
- How do students perceive the usefulness of essay writing in enhancing their communication, critical thinking, and self-reflection skills?
- What are the differences in soft skill acquisition between students exposed to the experimental model and those in the control group?

Literature Review
Fundamentals of the communicative-activity approach

The integration of soft skills development within language courses, particularly through essay writing, represents a significant advancement in pedagogical approaches, addressing the need for holistic student development beyond mere linguistic proficiency [26]. Soft skills, encompassing interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, are critical for navigating the complexities of the 21st-century workplace and contributing effectively to a knowledge-based economy. These skills, which include communication, critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression, are not explicitly taught in traditional curricula, yet they are essential for success in academic, professional, and personal spheres. Educational settings provide a crucial environment for fostering identity construction, underscoring the importance of equipping teachers with effective strategies to cultivate both hard and soft skills in students. The development of writing skills is seen as the acquisition of basic communicative competence, and tasks aimed at improving these skills are viewed as valuable tools for structuring educational activities. In fact, excellent writing is a skill that students should master to reap many benefits, considering that writing equates to excellent proficiency [27]. Furthermore, writing is a complex form of communication that needs training. Integrating soft skills into undergraduate education is vital, and project-based learning offers a meaningful way for students to apply and develop these skills [28].

This research explores how a communicative and activity-oriented teaching approach influences the enhancement of soft skills in secondary school students through essay writing, with a focus on applying theoretical knowledge in practice. Mastery of writing skills is essential for students, as strong writing abilities are closely associated with high levels of language proficiency and offer numerous academic and personal advantages. Writing as a form of communication has the benefit of improving intelligence, developing initiative power and creativity. Considering the increasing importance of soft skills for graduates, there is a growing demand for graduates to possess more than just technical skills. This approach diverges from conventional language teaching methods that primarily focus on grammar and vocabulary acquisition, by foregrounding the development of transferable skills that enhance students' overall communicative competence. Furthermore, communication skills are an essential life skill to be developed, highlighting the need for educational strategies that enhance students' ability to convey ideas, listen actively, and adapt their communication to different contexts. For successful socialization, a graduate must effectively master all types of speech activity in their unity and interrelation, and have a certain communicative

and speech experience. Speech is a universal tool for self-expression and positioning of a linguistic personality in a social environment [29].

The communicative-activity orientation in modern language teaching ensures the convergence of the learning process and real communication, focusing on the development of students' speech-thinking abilities necessary for full-fledged communication and cooperation. The communicative-activity approach is based on the principles of developmental learning, interprets the learning process as the integrity of communication, activity and methodological learning system. In the works of scientists and methodologists [30], the idea of teaching schoolchildren speech communication as an activity, and language learning as a means of communication sounds. Within the framework of this approach, the ability to write essays can be worked out in the process of enriching the entire structure of a student's speech, as a result of mastering various types of speech activity in their unity and interconnection through a system of creative exercises.

At the same time, the analysis of methodological literature, the experience of practical teachers and their own experience allow us to supplement valuable ideas about the principles and content of the communicative-activity approach. The communicative-activity approach, which ensures the convergence of the learning process and real communication, is productive for the development of students' speech if the principles of communication, activity, reflexivity, variability, creativity, psychological comfort, integrity, and continuity are implemented.

Problems of essay writing methodology

For successful socialization, the graduate must effectively master all types of speech activity in their unity and relationship, and have a certain communicative and speech experience. Speech is a universal tool for self-expression and positioning of the language personality in the social environment. Practice shows [31] that at the end of school, students do not have enough communication skills to ensure their competent and effective behavior. Graduates have certain difficulties in creating coherent written statements on the final essay and on the unified state exam in their native language: they are not able to use language tools with regard to their communicative expediency, create evaluative statements, and include their personal experience and universal interdisciplinary knowledge of integration training in their arguments.

In the early 20th century, the methodology of teaching literature saw an active debate concerning the instruction of essay writing. This discourse was notably influenced by Taylor's [32] article titled "Content and Written Form: A Two-Way Street". Challenging the views of certain scholars who believed that the creative process should remain untouched, Taylor emphasized the importance of explicitly teaching students how to structure and compose written texts.

The choice of a free-form essay as a subject for teaching speech utterance is due to the increasing importance of this genre not only for the educational and scientific activities of high school students, but also for the future social and professional practice of a school graduate as an active member of modern society. The essay represents a widely utilized and highly relevant genre of public discourse [33], actively employed across digital platforms, telecommunications, and various online communication formats.

Essay writing skills are in demand when preparing for the final essay in the 11th grade and for the unified state exam in the native language. It is known that special attention is paid to checking the level of formation of students' speech abilities: the ability to competently attract their own personal experience, independently find an original way to solve a social and moral problem and answer problematic questions. The essay as a form of written work expresses individual impressions and reasoning in the author's interpretation of the language material. Using the essay-writing model in speech practice will allow the language personality to abandon the template in the design of their own utterance and search for new original genre models for reasoning.

The work of teaching essays opens up wide opportunities for improving the writing and speech skills of high school students. Integration training actualizes the communicative experience available in the practice of the language personality and contributes to the formation of personal characteristics of the graduate: creative, critical thinking, capable of independent communicative actions [34].

All this indicates that the creation of the essay text is a productive process of speech-thinking, speech-creating activity, which is based on an active, creative nature with the obligatory search for the right word.

In recent years, interest in the essay has grown noticeably. In the socio-cultural space of the modern world [35],

there is a demand for the essay genre not only in the field of literature, journalism, but also the Internet, television, which is explained by a number of reasons: accessibility, openness of this genre to everyone regardless of the sphere of activity, status, personal beginning, free form of presentation, small volume, variety of topics (philosophical, literary, historical, journalistic, etc.), orientation to spoken language, etc.

Methodologists and practical teachers note that the essay as a productive type of written work is becoming one of the most relevant genres in the speech practice of schoolchildren. Contemporary scholars specializing in giftedness and creativity assert that collaborative creation plays a vital role in fostering students' communicative competence and creative potential. Experimental-experimental training of essays is based on the joint activity of the teacher and students on the principles of partnership, when each of the participants is interested in communicating with the interlocutor. Entering into a relationship of cooperation and co-creation, the teacher focuses, first of all, not on the "student" but on the personality of the student and the prospects for his development. This type of communication is particularly significant in shaping the value-based internal stance of high school students, as it emerges primarily through engagement in collaborative activities [36].

The author's viewpoint on the importance of simulating authentic speech situations that offer high school students the opportunity to make choices appears well-grounded. By the time students complete their secondary education, they should be capable of independently setting goals, planning their actions, executing tasks with self-monitoring and adjustments, utilizing available resources effectively, and selecting appropriate strategies to succeed in various real-life contexts. However, it should be emphasized that despite all the demand and positive assessment of speech practice, the essay is intended for self-development of speech abilities and formation of communicative competence of the language personality [37], there is no unified system of methodological recommendations to support the practice of teaching high school students essays as a genre in the school system for the development of coherent speech in the native language lessons based on a communicative-activity approach; there is no unity of requirements for the choice of topics, style design and evaluation criteria for such an original type of utterance.

The position of Methodists is vulnerable in that, focusing on certain features, they do not decipher and explain them to students, while this issue is complex and still continues to be understood in literary studies. Such concepts as essayism (the way of thinking), the essayistic style, which is characteristic of other genre forms, and the essay itself, are also not divorced. The question of the essay's embodiment in other literary forms is not considered in detail. The researchers do not offer a system of preparation, but only individual steps of step-by-step training in the ability to write an essay.

Theoretical Framework: Essay Writing and Developing Soft Skills

The research suggests that writing is an essential language skill that should be given emphasis in second language learning. It allows students to express ideas and communicate effectively by focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and critical thinking [38]. An integrated approach that combines language skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening can be used in the classroom.

Learners of English as a foreign language frequently encounter challenges related to grammatical accuracy, sentence structure, and appropriate vocabulary usage, all of which can negatively affect the quality of their written expression [39]. The multifaceted nature of writing presents challenges to students due to its cognitive demands and the necessity for learners to adeptly manage various linguistic elements simultaneously. The challenges faced by students may include poor grammar, unclear organization, and weak reasoning.

The writing process can be a challenging endeavor for students, particularly when they struggle to express their thoughts effectively. Students studying English as a foreign language often struggle with grammar, constructing coherent sentences, and selecting suitable vocabulary, which may significantly undermine the effectiveness of their writing.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design and Procedures

This study employed a mixed-methods quasi-experimental design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the impact of a pedagogical intervention on students' soft skills development through essay writing. The methodology combined structured intervention with diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments across both

control and experimental groups.

The qualitative component involved open-ended questionnaire items, student-written essays, and semi-structured teacher interviews. These were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The coding process followed a multi-stage procedure:

- Two independent researchers reviewed the textual data and conducted open coding to identify preliminary categories related to soft skills indicators;
- Emergent categories were then clustered into broader themes corresponding to the conceptual framework of soft skills;
- Final themes were refined, and representative quotes were selected to illustrate qualitative findings across pre- and post-intervention data sets.

Themes were iteratively refined through a cyclical process of comparison across multiple data sources, including student essays, questionnaire responses, and interview transcripts. This involved repeatedly revisiting the data to identify consistent patterns, merge overlapping categories, and distinguish unique subthemes. Throughout this process, triangulation was used to validate themes by checking their presence and consistency across both qualitative and quantitative datasets, thereby enhancing the analytical depth and interpretive reliability of the findings.

To ensure the reliability of the data, both quantitative and qualitative validation procedures were applied. Quantitatively, the effectiveness of the intervention was statistically validated using the Kramer-Welch test. This test was employed to compare the outcomes of two independent groups-control and experimental-based on the number of correctly completed tasks related to essay writing. Hypothesis testing was conducted at a 0.05 significance level with a critical value of T_{crit} = 1.96. The statistical analysis confirmed a significant difference in performance, supporting the intervention's effectiveness.

Although a formal statistical measure like Cohen's Kappa was not used, cross-checking and iterative discussions between coders ensured consistency and transparency in the interpretation of qualitative data. This dual-layered validation strengthens the methodological rigor of the study and enhances the credibility of its findings.

The hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): The performance outcomes of the control group and the experimental group do not differ significantly.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): A statistically significant difference exists in the performance outcomes between the control group and the experimental group.

2.2. Research Context and Participants

The experimental base of the research was "MSI General secondary school №5 named after Muratbayev"; "MSI boarding School №7 named after S. Yerubayev"; "MSI General secondary school №22"; "MSI General secondary school №6 named after T. Bigeldinov"; "MSI General secondary school № 7" in Turkistan, Turkistan region, Kazakhstan.

The sampling strategy followed a purposive approach, targeting 10th- and 11th-grade students from five secondary schools in Turkistan, Kazakhstan. A total of 204 students participated in the study, divided evenly between control and experimental groups (n=102 each). The selection ensured demographic and academic comparability across the two groups, minimizing potential bias.

To evaluate students' preparedness for essay writing and their current level of soft skills, a pre-intervention questionnaire and writing tasks were administered. The survey included items designed to assess their conceptual understanding of the essay genre, familiarity with its structural elements, prior experience, and interest in learning essay writing. The writing tasks measured students' practical abilities in expressing ideas, structuring arguments, and employing personal and stylistic elements in their work.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experienced language teachers to gather their perspectives on teaching essay writing, their familiarity with genre-based instruction, and the relevance of soft skills development within language courses. Teachers were also invited to share best practices and challenges encountered in fostering students' communicative competencies.

2.3. Research stages

The research was carried out in three distinct stages:

- *Diagnostic and Preparatory Phase*
  The initial stage involved identifying the research problem, reviewing existing literature on soft skills and essay

writing pedagogy, and conducting a nationwide teacher survey. A total of 200 teachers with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 20 years participated in the survey, which provided valuable insights into current practices and gaps in methodological support.

- *Design and Implementation of the Intervention*
  At this stage, a comprehensive model for teaching essay writing was developed. The model integrated communicative-activity principles with a focus on enhancing students' soft skills through structured writing tasks, peer interaction, and reflection.
- *Experimental Testing and Evaluation*
  Experimental instruction was implemented in the selected schools, followed by a post-test evaluation of students' written output and survey responses. The outcomes were analyzed to determine the impact of the intervention on students' soft skills development, essay-writing performance, and self-perceived communicative growth.

3. Results

3.1. Teacher Perspectives on Essay Writing and Soft Skills Instruction

To identify the current state of methodological preparedness for teaching essay writing as a soft skills development tool, 200 secondary school teachers across five schools in Turkistan participated in a diagnostic survey. The questionnaire explored their teaching experience, familiarity with the essay genre, methodological knowledge, and perceived needs for professional support.

The results revealed notable gaps:

- Only 3% to 77% of teachers reported using essay writing in their practice.
- Between 25% and 69% of teachers struggled to provide a clear definition of the essay genre.
- A limited number (6% to 47%) were familiar with methodological literature on essay instruction.
- Importantly, 97% to 100% expressed a strong need for methodological assistance, such as training courses, seminars, and teaching manuals, specifically targeting essay writing and its connection to students' communicative competence.

These findings suggest that while teachers recognize the value of essay writing, they lack systematic training and resources to integrate it effectively into soft skills instruction.

3.2. Students' Readiness and Attitudes Toward Essay Writing

To test the readiness of secondary school students to write an essay (stating an experiment), a questionnaire was drawn up and practical tasks were prepared. The questions presented in the questionnaire help to identify the level of students' knowledge about the essay and their attitude to this genre. The survey was conducted anonymously.

The questionnaire questions and survey results are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Student Responses on Essay Writing Knowledge and Experience (Pre-Intervention).

№	Question	Yes	No	Other Option
1	Do you know what an "essay" is? Can you give the definition of "essay"?	19%	81%	
2	Do you know the origin of the word "essay", who is considered the founder of the genre?	2%	98%	
3	Have you previously engaged in writing an essay?	81%	19%	
4	If you have ever written in the essay genre, did you encounter any challenges during the writing process?	79%	21%	
5	In your opinion, does the essay genre maintain its relevance in contemporary journalism, and why?	67%	21%	12%
6	Are you interested in learning the process of essay writing?	91%	4%	5%

To the question "Do you know the origin of the word 'essay', who is considered the founder of the genre?" only 2 respondents (2 %) out of 200 answered in the affirmative;

4, 5, 6 questions were asked to find out how students feel about essay writing and what practice they have in this genre. To the question: "Have you ever written an essay? "almost all respondents (81 %) answered "Yes"; 19% admitted that they had never written an essay. Some students remembered that they wrote such works "at school" or "in social studies classes".

The results of the ascertaining experiment confirm that high school students need basic knowledge of theoretical and practical foundations for teaching the practice of writing essays.

3.3. Structure and content of the model

The training model is designed to implement the basic conditions for competent methodological support for the formation of General communicative and soft skills in the practice of teaching essay creation as a product of students' communicative and creative activity.

The applied aspect of the program has been strengthened to the maximum, including a set of methods and techniques aimed at activating the personal communication experience of high school students, and developing the creative potential of the individual. The program of experimental training provides students with knowledge from the field of creative psychology, contains special methods for the development of associative thinking, and justifiably includes group and individual work of students in the context of the formation of knowledge and skills of coherent speech.

The aim of the experimental training is to develop high school students' general communicative competence and soft skills in writing essays, approached as a form of school composition, within native language lessons based on a communicative and activity-oriented methodology.

For the successful implementation of the goal of pilot training the following tasks were formulated:

1) to structure the program's content by integrating key theoretical concepts along with a comprehensive system of instructional tasks;
2) to provide a rationale for the expected learning outcomes in accordance with the national secondary education standards, particularly regarding the development of students' coherent speech;
3) to identify and define appropriate instructional methods, strategies, and resources aimed at fostering students' general communicative competence and mastery of genre-specific stylistic features;
4) to select, organize, and systematize didactic materials that support students in the process of essay preparation and composition;
5) to evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented methodological approach through practical application.

Let's consider the main content and methodological components of the developed training system (**Figure 1**).

In accordance with the state educational standard of secondary General education, we consider the program of experimental training in the communicative-activity channel, which is an integral part of the modern system-activity approach.

The proposed structural and functional model of a methodological system for the development of soft skills in teaching essay writing presents a novel integration of communicative-activity theory with soft skills training within the Kazakhstani secondary school context. Unlike prior approaches that primarily emphasized genre mastery or linguistic accuracy, this model synergistically combines genre-based writing instruction with the deliberate cultivation of soft skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, self-regulation, and creativity. It stands out by addressing both student needs and teacher preparedness, offering a comprehensive system that includes diagnostic assessment, reflexive activities, and differentiated instruction tailored to diverse learning profiles.

Furthermore, the model operationalizes soft skills development through structured stages - from initial genre familiarization to the synthesis of expressive writing techniques-while embedding formative feedback and reflective journaling to support students' metacognitive growth.

3.4. The main stages of teaching essay writing in school

The findings of this study have several important implications for educational practice. For effective implementation, it is recommended that teacher training programs incorporate modules focused on genre-based pedagogy, soft skills integration, and reflective teaching strategies. Specifically, teachers should be trained not only in the mechanics of essay instruction but also in fostering student autonomy, encouraging peer collaboration, and using formative assessment tools that target communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Curriculum developers could embed soft skills indicators into language course objectives and assessments, ensuring that writing instruction goes beyond structural competence to include expressive and analytical dimensions. Additionally, schools in multicultural or multilingual contexts may benefit from adapting the model with culturally responsive materials and differentiated instruction approaches.
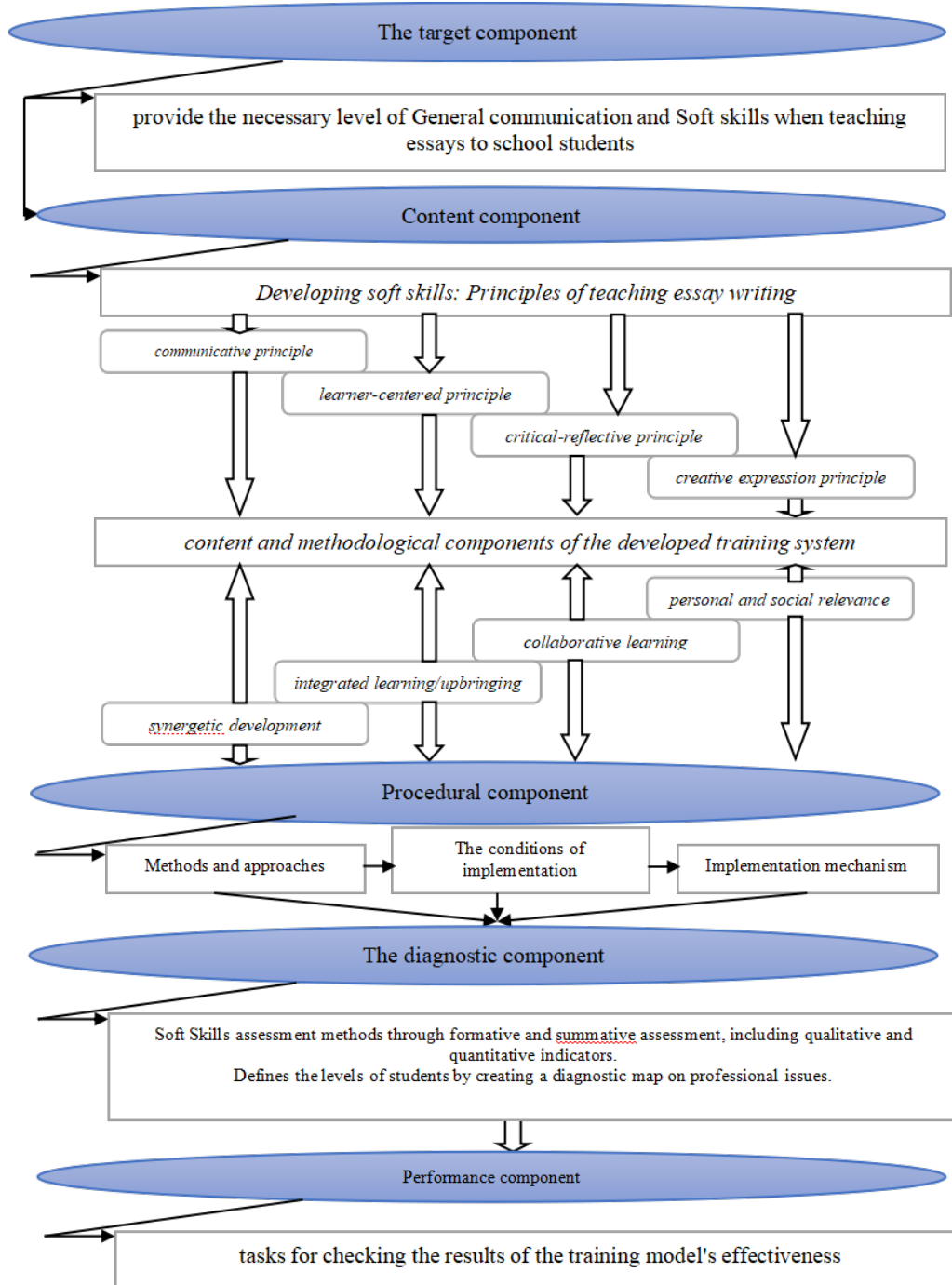
Figure 1. A structural and functional model of a methodological system for the development of soft skills in teaching essay writing.

According to the model in our study, Experiential Learning consists of 4 stages, which include:

At the first preparatory stage, programs and textbooks on literature and the Kazakh language were analyzed (section "speech Development") and knowledge and skills were identified (see tables), which students can rely on when creating an essay. We have also identified those topics from literature and Kazakh language lessons in grades 10-11 that allow us to begin initial preparation for creating essays or other personality-oriented genres.

During the second phase of instruction, the essay is explored as a literary genre: students are introduced to its scholarly definition, the historical evolution of the genre is examined, core genre characteristics are explained, and its main types are presented, followed by reinforcement of the acquired knowledge.

In the third phase, students deepen their understanding of the essay through the analysis of model texts, engage in various comparative exercises, and examine the essay in relation to other closely related genres, such as prose poems, epistolary forms, reflective pieces, and dialogic texts.

In the fourth stage of the instructional process, students move from preliminary exercises and analytical review toward composing drafts and producing independent creative works within the essay genre.

Didactic learning conditions (analysis of content and technological bases).

1) Introduction to the essay genre
   Learning content:

   - Familiarity with the history of the origin and development of the essay genre;
   - Analysis and comparison of genre definitions in different reference books and dictionaries;
   - Identifying the specifics of the essay as a genre, clarifying its genre -forming features; highlighting the features characteristic of this type of essay;
   - Clarification of the different types of essays, including literary-critical, artistic, journalistic-artistic, historical, and philosophical forms, as well as their literary genre manifestations such as speeches, letters, reflections, diary entries, moral reflections, confessions, lyrical miniatures, notes, and reviews.

   Tasks and methodological support:
   - Organize independent work of students with reference, educational, and cognitive literature on the study of the history of the origin and development of the essay genre;
   - Organize the work of students to analyze and compare the definitions of the essay genre in different reference books and dictionaries, to identify the specifics of the essay as a genre, to clarify its genre-forming features; to highlight the features characteristic of this type of essay;
   - Organize the work of students to clarify on the basis of reference and educational, educational literature, the types of essays and literary forms of the genre.

2) Analysis of literary samples of essays
   Learning content:

   - Recognition of essays, identification of specific features of essays on specific samples;
   - Analysis of the content and structural features of essays embodied in different literary forms;
   - Comparison of essays with similar genres;
   - Identification of ways of mastering reality, determining the author's means of artistic expression in texts;
   - Familiarity with the technique of Association when creating an essay on the example of essay texts

   Tasks and methodological support:
   - Organize the work of students to recognize the genre of the essay, to identify specific features of the essay on specific samples;
   - Teach students to identify the content and structural features of essays embodied in different literary forms;
   - Organize the work of students to compare essays with similar genres in form;
   - Organize the work of students to identify ways to master reality and determine the author's means of artistic expression in texts.

3) Analysis of student essays and writing creative works
   Learning content:

   - Identification of the originality of the idea, ways of comprehending reality and means of artistic expression in student essays;
   - Using the Association technique when creating a thumbnail: sketch, sketch, sketch, notes, etc.;
   - Use of original techniques for creating essays: "original introduction", "unexpected transition", "paradoxical conclusion", etc.; introduction of author's visual tools and expressive syntax;
   - Writing an essay (essay-memory "First meeting with a poet (with a writer)", "My poet (writer)", etc.; literary-critical, philosophical, etc.);
   - Writing creative works in epistolary style (letters to friends, famous people, etc.; letters on behalf of a literary hero; pages from a diary, etc.); in the genre of words, essays, letters, speeches, moral sermons, etc.
   - Writing an essay-an essay in the form of a word,

letter, speech, diary, moral sermon, confession, lyrical miniature, etc.

Tasks and methodological support:

- Organize the work of students on reviewing and editing essays;
- To identify the originality of the idea, ways of comprehending reality and means of artistic expression in student essays;
- Develop students' associative thinking; teach them to use the Association technique when creating a miniature: etude, sketch, sketches, notes, etc.;
- Teach you to use original techniques for creating essays: "original introduction", "unexpected transition", "paradoxical conclusion", etc.; introduce individual authors' visual means and speech figures (metaphorical and symbolic images, figures of omission, similarity, comparison; syntactic parallelism, etc.);
- Organize the work of students on writing essays (essay-memoirs "First meeting with a poet (with a writer)", "My poet (writer)", etc.; literary-critical, philosophical, etc.); creative works in epistolary style; in the genre of words, essays, letters, speeches, moral sermons, confessions, etc.; essays-essays in the form of words, letters, speeches, diaries, moral sermons, confessions, etc.

4) Final quality control of mastering the system of requirements for essay writing in the genre of essays

Learning content:

Implementation of practical tasks by students and summing up the results of experimental training

Tasks and methodological support:

- Check the effectiveness of the proposed experimental training based on the implementation of practical tasks by students.

Guidelines for writing an essay and essay evaluation criteria

Creating a compelling essay requires a clear awareness of the writing's purpose, a well-defined authorial stance on the given topic, and the presence of sincerity and emotional engagement. It also demands the effective use of figurative and expressive language tools, along with a broad range of well-substantiated arguments and reflections that demonstrate a high level of intellectual competence.

Despite the free form of organization of the composition, the structure of the essay assumes such parts as introduction, main part and conclusion.

Introductory part

- The introduction should contain one or two short paragraphs, each consisting of at least two sentences, aimed at capturing the reader's interest and smoothly guiding them toward the central issue addressed in the essay;
- The opening may begin with a striking quote or an impactful statement. To engage the audience, rhetorical questions, metaphorical comparisons, or the presentation of an unexpected fact related to the essay's theme may also be effectively employed.

Main part

- The body of the essay is structured around one or more theses, each supported by a set of arguments;
- Each thesis should be presented as a concise, complete thought that reflects the main idea the author intends to communicate to the reader;
- It is advisable to incorporate linking words and expressions typical for this genre, which help to expand on ideas and provide relevant supporting information.

Conclusion

- The concluding section of the essay should present the author's final reflections and summarize the key points discussed;
- While the introduction introduces the central problem, the conclusion should encapsulate the author's perspective on that issue, bringing the argument to a coherent end;
  to effectively summarize, it is recommended to use concluding expressions and transition phrases that signal closure and synthesis.

The effectiveness of essay writing largely depends on having a well-structured mental outline (though a written outline is not required in the final version), establishing logical connections between ideas, engaging in regular writing practice, and being able to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge and literary understanding. Form of the essay. Writing an essay on the native language and literature takes 3 astronom-

ical hours. You can choose from 10 essay topics: 5 literary topics, 5 free topics.

The recommended number of words is 250–300. Exam participants are allowed to use anthologies, texts of works, spelling, explanatory dictionaries, encyclopedic dictionaries of winged words and expressions. Students' essays are evaluated according to the criteria presented in **Tables 2–3.**

Table 2. Criteria for evaluating the essay content.

Criteria	Descriptors	Points
Comprehensive coverage of the topic alongside the clarity and persuasiveness of the author's reasoning — scored at 2 points	Demonstration of a clear and well-substantiated grasp of the assigned topic	1
	The content of the essay deviates from the central theme	0
	Identification and formulation of the central issue	1
	The central issue is either inaccurately identified or entirely omitted	0
Argument (Strength and validity of reasoning) 3 points	Inclusion of relevant argument(s) from a literary work that aligns with the topic of the essay	1
	Presence of supporting arguments from external sources that substantiate the author's viewpoint	1
	Demonstration of a distinct and well-articulated authorial stance	1
Compositional integrity and consistency 3 points	The essay demonstrates compositional coherence, with logically connected sections and a consistently developing line of reasoning	1
	Demonstrates internal logical consistency and the ability to transition effectively between specific examples and generalizations	1
	Demonstrates originality through creative connections, unexpected perspectives, and fresh insights in the conclusions	1
Speechculture 2 points	Application of expressive language tools and stylistic devices to enhance the artistic quality of the text	1
	Demonstrates emotional expressiveness and dynamic, engaging language throughout the text	1
	Maximumscore	**10**

Table 3. Scale for converting points to a mark.

Points	Mark	Levels
8–10	5	High
5–7	4	Average
0–4	3	Low

Based on the evaluation of essay quality according to the established criteria, it was revealed that during the experimental training, the majority of students in the experimental group demonstrated the formation of fundamental communicative and written discourse skills related to producing coherent texts in the essay genre, with 36% reaching a high level and 43% showing an average level of proficiency.

Experimental verification of the model's effectiveness

According to the results of the ascertaining experiment, 1 control and 1 experimental class with the same low results were selected. To verify the objectivity of the results of testing the effectiveness of the training method, we have attempted a comparative analysis of the final experiment of students in the experimental and control groups. In relation to our experimental training, the concept of "control group" defines a group of students who have not been subjected to any experimental influence, but are compared with the experimental group when testing the program requirements for the formation of General communication and genre-stylistic skills of students. The control group increases the objectivity of the experiment results and serves as a guide when comparing the training criteria and when proving the effectiveness of experimental training.

In total, 56 people took part in the experimental test: the control group-28, the experimental group-28. Students of the control group are engaged in the same program as students of the experimental group.

Experimental verification of the effectiveness of the training model consisted of a series of practical tasks to choose from (text analysis essay plan, writing essays for citation, writing essays on the subject), which allowed for determining the level of formation of speech skills in essay

writing. In addition, we considered it appropriate to give students a questionnaire in the first part of the experimental test, which will reveal the level of students' knowledge about the essay and their attitude to this genre.

Tasks for testing the effectiveness of the training model largely repeated the questions of the ascertaining experiment.

It was important for us to check the level of formation of skills of analysis and essay writing at the initial and final stages in the same conditions (**Table 4**). At the same time, the tasks for the final stage are questions of medium and high level of complexity, in contrast to the ascertaining experiment (sufficient and medium level of complexity).

Table 4. Results of the survey of students.

Questions	Answers	before the experiment(%)		after the experiment(%)	
		CG	EG	CG	EG
Can you give the definition of "essay"?	Yes	30	19	39	81
	No	70	81	61	19
Do you know the origin of the word "essay"?	Yes	5	2	11	71
	No	95	98	89	29
Can you list and describe the types of essays in terms of content?	Yes	6	21	7	68
	No	94	79	93	32
Can you write an essay?	Yes	40	18	43	70
	No	60	82	57	30
If you wrote an essay in the genre of essay, did you experience any difficulties in the writing process?	Yes	60	10	61	54
	No	40	90	39	46

1 question "Can you define 'essay'?" almost all students of the experimental group (82 % - 23 people) correctly defined the genre. 5 people (18 %) of the experimental group found it difficult to answer, but nevertheless gave a brief definition of the essay. At the same time, only 39 % (11 people) of the control group were able to partially define the essay.

To the question "Can you list special features of the essay genre ", 32 % (9 people) of the control group and 89% (25 people) of the experimental group answered in the affirmative. Respectively, 68 % (19 people) of respondents in the control group and 1 % (3 people).

The content of 4, 5 questions is related to the classification of the essay and its literary forms. On question 4, " Can you list and describe the types of essays in terms of content? Can you name the features of different essays?", students of the control group (93 % (26 people) found it difficult to give an answer. Only two people (7 %) of this group correctly listed the types of essays (philosophical, historical, artistic) and named some of their features. 7 question, "Can you write an essay? Yes" was answered by 68 % (19 people) of the experimental group and 43 % (12 people) of the control group; "no" was answered by 14 % (4 people) of the experimental group and 57 % (16 people) of the control group (**Figure 2**).

The level of independent communicative and speech activities

Further, it seems to us expedient to determine the level of independent communicative and speech activity of students in writing an essay after experimental training.

So, the following parameters were the indicators of determining the level of independence of students in writing an essay: the level of knowledge of the problems, the author's originality; the level of completeness of content and factual; the level of logic of organization and reasoning; the level of speech and expressiveness; the level of correctness of speech design.

The analysis of the essays of the students of the experimental group showed that the majority of schoolchildren convincingly substantiate the relevance and significance of the topic proposed for reflection, present an evaluative author's judgment, and show a "vision" of the problem. Students substantiate their position and views based on arguments; they are able to systematize, illustrate with examples important historical and social science or historical and cultural concepts included in the essay; in conclusion, they summarize the main ideas expressed in the main part, and offer a sum of judgments that leave a field for further discussion.
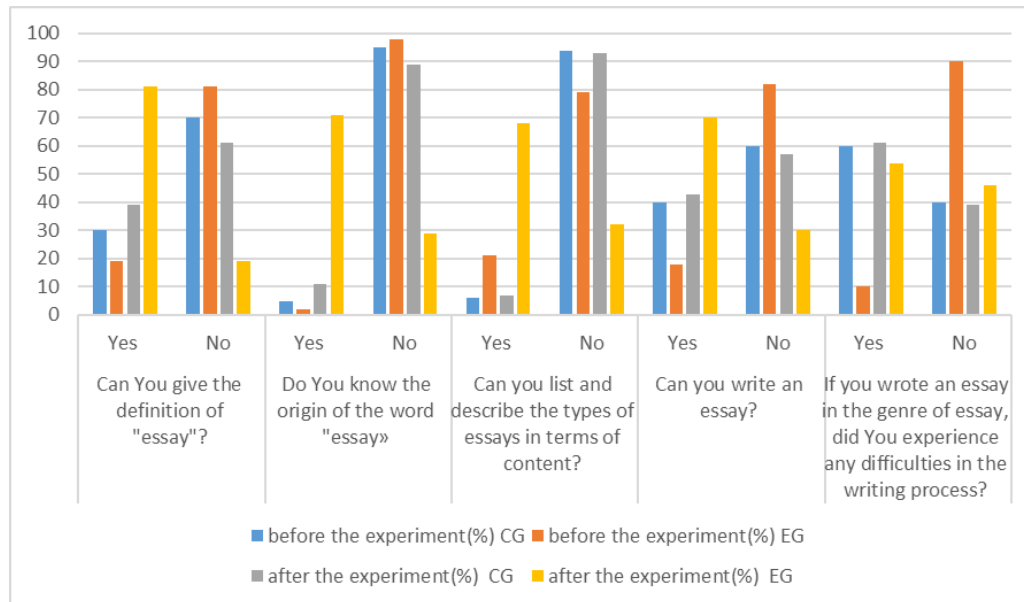
Figure 2. Results of the survey of students.

There is no doubt that the work on the formation of general communicative and genre-stylistic skills of students in the process of teaching essay writing activates the communicative and creative potential of students. Students of the experimental group (60%) take an active part in various literary competitions, scientific and practical conferences. The results of the creative participation of students in the control group are insignificant, amounting to 33%.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the experimental instructional model, a hypothesis testing procedure was conducted using the Kramer-Welch test, which is appropriate for comparing means between two independent groups with unequal variances. The two groups in this study were the control group (which received traditional instruction) and the experimental group (which received instruction based on the proposed communicative-activity model).

At the pre-intervention stage, the empirical test statistic was Temp = 0.7, which is considerably less than the critical value T_{crit} = 1.96 at a significance level of α = 0.05. This result indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of their essay writing performance before the implementation of the experimental model. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0)—stating that both groups performed equally—was accepted, confirming the initial comparability of the groups.

At the post-intervention stage, however, the results changed significantly. The empirical test statistic increased to Temp = 5.7, which is greater than T_{crit} = 1.96. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which asserts that a statistically significant difference exists between the performances of the two groups. This outcome provides strong evidence, with 95% confidence, that the students in the experimental group significantly outperformed those in the control group following the intervention.

The statistical analysis confirms that the proposed instructional model had a measurable and positive impact on students' essay writing performance and associated soft skills development. Moreover, the findings suggest a slightly higher rate of formation of methodological and communicative competencies among students exposed to the experimental technologies. This supports the broader conclusion that communicative-activity-based instructional strategies are not only pedagogically sound but also feasible and effective for integration into school-level language education frameworks.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of a communicative-activity-based model for essay writing instruction contributes significantly to the development of students' soft skills—namely communication, criti-

cal thinking, creativity, and reflective reasoning. These results are consistent with the conclusions of Barbot et al. [40], who emphasized the essay as a tool for integrating multiple domain-specific competencies. The observed increase in students' ability to define, structure, and creatively approach essay topics supports earlier claims by Warburton[41] that effective writing pedagogy enhances both linguistic and stylistic fluency. Prior research by Burkitbayeva et al. [42] and Ramankulov et al. [43] highlighted that many secondary students lack genre awareness and communicative competence due to fragmented or insufficient writing instruction. Our study addressed these gaps by applying the communicative-activity framework[44], which enabled students to view writing as an interactive, socially meaningful process. Furthermore, the statistical significance of the results (Temp = 5.7 > Tcrit = 1.96) reinforces Herppich et al.'s proposition that soft skills development can be reliably measured within educational environments. While most students demonstrated measurable progress, a portion (21%) still exhibited low levels of independent writing activity, suggesting the need for sustained and differentiated pedagogical support. Nonetheless, this study substantiates the value of essay writing as a multifaceted instructional tool for promoting essential soft skills in language learning contexts.

While the findings of this study are promising, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the results more critically. The study was conducted exclusively in selected schools within Turkistan, Kazakhstan, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader educational systems with different curricular standards, cultural approaches to writing, or language education practices. Future research could address these limitations by replicating the study across diverse educational settings, extending the duration of the intervention, and incorporating external evaluators for more robust assessment. Despite these constraints, the study offers valuable insights into the role of communicative-activity-based instruction in enhancing students' soft skills and contributes meaningfully to both local and international pedagogical discourse.

5. Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence that structured essay writing instruction, grounded in a communicative-activity approach, is an effective pedagogical strategy for developing key soft skills-such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression within the context of language courses. The implemented model not only enhanced students' genre awareness and written fluency but also fostered greater confidence in articulating opinions, organizing arguments, and employing stylistic devices independently and coherently. The statistically significant differences observed between the experimental and control groups confirm the effectiveness of the instructional model and underscore the potential of essay writing as both a linguistic and soft skills developmental practice.

Importantly, the study highlights the need to reconceptualize language instruction by moving beyond a purely technical focus toward a more holistic approach that supports students' personal, academic, and social growth. The communicative-activity framework proved especially valuable in promoting writing as a purposeful, interactive, and reflective process. The findings also point to a strong interest among students in mastering essay writing and a recognized need among teachers for pedagogical guidance in integrating soft skills into language instruction.

While the results are encouraging, it is essential to acknowledge limitations related to the generalizability of the findings beyond the Kazakhstani context and the duration of the intervention. Nevertheless, the model offers practical value and adaptability. It can inform curriculum design, teacher training programs, and classroom practices across diverse educational settings. Future research may explore long-term applications of the model, cross-cultural comparisons, and the integration of digital tools, including AI-based feedback systems, to further enhance students' soft skills through writing. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for student-centered, competency-based approaches in modern language education.

Author Contributions

M.R.: Writing – original draft, Conceptualization; S.R.: Data curation, Software, Visualization; M.N.: Data curation, Software, Visualization; G.R.: Writing – original draft, Methodology; Z.D.: Supervision, Writing – review and editing; M.A.: Supervision, Writing – review and editing.

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