

Teaching Foreign Language Communication in the Context of a Functional and Semantic Approach

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Abstract

This paper explores the functional-semantic methodology of foreign language teaching for non-philologists. It surveys schools in Kazakhstan, the USA and some European countries and the grammatical and semantic features of English used for professional communication. In surveying programmes, methodologies, and resources, fundamental concepts for professional grammar and vocabulary were established. Evidence suggests that using speech patterns in professionally orientated communication enhances learning in foreign languages. Transformative practices facilitate the improvement of communicative competence by incorporating flexible grammar patterns and transforming language units into “real life” scenarios. A semantic study shows that professionally orientated thematic vocabulary fields help professionals remember and use language units. The functional-semantic methodology structures pedagogical information coherently and maximises the relationship between form, meaning, and scenarios. The Kazakhstani experience shows that tourism professionals should be trained in intercultural communication, professional vocabulary and terminology, and

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grammatical transformations. The functional-semantic methodology is a foreign language teaching methodology for professionally orientated learning and offers insightful curriculum and resource recommendations, the paper concludes.

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Introduction

The development of foreign language communication skills in the professional field is one of the most essential elements of professional training, as it implies the ability to communicate, convey information, justify one's opinion and perform professional duties in a foreign language. This requires not just vocabulary and grammar but also competence in using linguistic strategies in certain sociocultural situations. It is vital in many professions that require constant communication with other people. For a wide variety of professional activities in the field of tourism and sociocultural services, knowledge of foreign languages is a prerequisite, as specialists in these areas have to communicate with clients, partners and colleagues from other countries, and they face the issues of intercultural communication (Mayis et al., 2021; Snigovska, 2025; Zamyatina et al., 2021). Systematic studying of the language training course in teaching language skills focused on professional communication will help students improve their competitiveness in the labour market.

Many scholars have addressed this issue by proposing approaches that strengthen foreign-language proficiency among students who are not language majors. Recent ESP research continues to show that communicative competence develops most robustly when linguistic form is practised in authentic professional tasks and supported by learner-centred course design. For example, Borasheva (2026) demonstrates that a flipped ESP classroom supported by Telegram can increase student engagement and motivation and is associated with perceived gains in speaking and listening, indicating the pedagogical value of embedding functional language use in interactionally meaningful learning routines.

A complementary line of evidence foregrounds intercultural communicative competence as a necessary dimension of professional communication, rather than an “add-on” skill. Yu and Wong (2026), using a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design in higher vocational education, report that an ELT module explicitly integrating intercultural communicative competence yields stronger improvements in professional oral English competence (and ICC) than standard instruction. This finding supports the present study's emphasis on situational modelling and the systematic alignment of language forms, meanings, and workplace contexts.

At the level of curriculum design, recent diagnostics of workplace-oriented language performance indicate that persistent gaps often cluster around grammar-lexis integration within professional genres, alongside sociolinguistic and intercultural demands. Tan et al. (2026) identify recurrent problems across multiple dimensions of Business English writing, including grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic competence, and intercultural competence, and argue for syllabus adaptation and prerequisite support in domain knowledge and intercultural communication. Although focused on Business English, the study reinforces the broader need for an organised system that prepares lexicalised grammatical material in relation to professional tasks and genre expectations – an issue directly addressed in tourism and socio-cultural service training. Kováčiková (2020) examines the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach. CLIL combines professional content learning with a focus on language, communication skills and terminology related to the profession. It is based on integrating content and language, cognitive development, intercultural space and a communicative approach. Tabuldina and Eskazinova (2021) reported experimental results that confirm CLIL is effective for non-philology students: it improves readiness for professional roles. The authors focused on functional literacy through text manipulation and stressed the importance of authentic materials in readying students to face realistic work scenarios in the foreign language. The study by Takuova et al. (2024) thoroughly examines the functional-semantic approach, which involves the systematic structuring of learning and the use of exercises adapted to the professional context.

Innovative approaches to teaching foreign languages focus on the use of modern methods that consider the features of students' professional activities. Semantic paradigms proposed by Mauitbekova and Bulatbayeva (2024) have proven effective in developing language skills, as they contribute to the structuring of lexical and grammatical material according to the context of professional communication. In the paper of Salakhova et al. (2022), methods of forming communicative competence in professionally oriented learning are considered, where the interdisciplinary approach stands out as an important component that allows integrating language knowledge with other industries. Ho (2020) stressed the effectiveness of the communication method, especially for tourism students, emphasising the importance of modelling real-world situations, which ensured the practical application of the acquired knowledge and skills.

The analysis of students' needs in the tourism sector regarding the use of English indicates the need to adapt the curriculum to the specific features of the industry, which was the subject of the study by Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021). Special attention is paid to the importance of a professionally oriented approach that considers real working conditions. In turn, Arifuddin et al. (2020) concentrated on strategies for mastering idiomatic expressions that are critical for effective communication in the hotel and restaurant business. These works contributed to the teaching of English, but there are

many under-researched domains, including building a task-based framework for the introduction of semantic units into English for professional communication.

Since Kazakhstan gained independence, the national education system has undergone significant transformations aimed at meeting international standards and responding to changing labor market needs. In the higher education sector, reforms introduced over the past decade have included the introduction of a three-cycle structure (bachelor's-master's-doctoral), the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and the expansion of international cooperation and English-language programs as part of an agenda inspired by the Bologna Process (National Center for Higher Education Development, 2025).

Kazakhstan's approach to language education is shaped by an ambitious multilingual policy aimed at improving proficiency in Kazakh, Russian, and foreign languages throughout the system, as outlined in national and international strategic documents. An analysis conducted by Imanova et al. (2025) shows that English language teaching in public schools suffers from a clear mismatch between policy directives and actual classroom conditions: educators face insufficient training, limited resources, and policies that do not fully meet local needs. Similarly, Yelubayeva et al. (2025) note that although multilingualism and internationalization are central policy goals, the uneven distribution of infrastructure and qualified personnel leads to inconsistent implementation across regions. The work of Kenzhe et al. (2025) also demonstrates the gradual implementation of integrated language-content approaches, such as CLIL/ICLHE, in higher education, and empirical data confirm their value in improving communicative competence in foreign languages among students outside linguistic majors. Together, these contributions suggest that Kazakhstan provides a favorable context for studying how professionally oriented foreign language programs can be integrated into non-language curricula.

However, the country's education policy also shows certain contradictions. Macro-level data links investment in education with innovation and income, but warns that increasing the number of students or institutions does not necessarily improve efficiency. Kireyeva (2025) highlights the vulnerability of top-down reforms, especially in multilingual environments with uneven distribution of resources. These patterns point to the need to consider professional language training in the context of broader systemic factors rather than as an isolated classroom practice. Your research on teaching lexicalized grammatical material to students of tourism and socio-cultural services responds to this need by linking classroom teaching methodology to broader political and institutional realities in Kazakhstan.

Numerous scholars have studied professionally orientated foreign language training for non-philologists, yet several critical gaps remain. Previous research has suggested effective methods, including CLIL, functional-semantic structuring, authentic text use for functional literacy, and personalised professional tasks. Most of these works do not

provide an organised system for preparing lexicalised grammatical content for tourist and socio-cultural services students. Integration of semantic units into professional communication is fragmented, and transformational activities' significance in creating communicative flexibility is not empirically supported. This difference widens in Kazakhstan, where multilingual policies are fast changing schooling. Existing studies on English-language teaching in Kazakhstan analyse policy implementation and methodological challenges but do not address how to systematise lexicalised grammatical material for non-philological majors in professional training programs. National language policy, tourism professional demands, and methodological preparation of lexical-semantic material are understudied.

This project develops and experimentally tests a functional-semantic method for lexicalising grammatical material geared to "Tourism" and "Socio-cultural service" students. Transformational tasks engage semantic units, improve speech flexibility, and prepare students to apply professional language structures in real-world communication. The paper presents theoretical reasoning and practical recommendations for strengthening professionally orientated foreign-language teaching in Kazakhstan by integrating classroom-level technique with institutional and policy contexts.

The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the system of preparation of lexicalised grammatical material in the context of a functional and semantic approach for the formation of foreign language communicative competence of students of non-philological specialities. The following tasks were set to achieve this goal: evaluate the mechanism of the system of preparation of lexicalised grammatical material for students, with special attention paid to the specifics of their professional activities; assess the importance of transformational tasks for the development of professionally oriented communication of students.

Materials and Methods

Study Context

The study was conducted in two higher education colleges in Kazakhstan delivering vocationally oriented Bachelor-level training for "tourism" and "socio-cultural service" specialities. In both institutions, the English-language component is embedded within state-regulated curricula aligned with national policy priorities for tourism workforce development (State Programme for Tourism Development, 2019-2025) and multilingual education ("trilingualism" roadmap for 2015-2020 in Kazakhstan (Minister of Education and Science..., 2015; Grigoriev, 2021)). Within this policy and labour-market context, English was selected as the target language because it functions as the dominant lingua franca for international tourism and hospitality communication, and it is explicitly positioned as professionally relevant within the participating programmes.

Instruction was delivered in a blended (hybrid) educational setting, combining in-person seminars focused on guided practice, role-play, and teacher feedback, with structured independent and semi-supervised digital learning on Moodle (course delivery and assessment), Duolingo (individualised micro-practice), and Quizlet (terminology rehearsal). To enable replication, the study context is defined not only by the institutional type and curriculum orientation, but also by the instructional ecology in which language learning occurred (contact classes plus platform-based practice), because this ecology shapes students' opportunities for exposure, rehearsal, and feedback.

Because the intervention logic presupposes that professional language growth emerges from the interaction between structured instruction and authentic professional discourse, the following mediating variables were specified a priori and documented for each group: (1) baseline English proficiency level at entry (A2-B1), (2) degree of authentic professional communication exposure (internship/service encounters, guided observation, or simulated client interaction), and (3) institutional access to language-learning infrastructure (multimedia classrooms, stable internet access, and availability of audio/video materials). These mediators were treated as contextual conditions that may strengthen or weaken the observed effect of functional-semantic instruction, and therefore require explicit description when attempting replication across settings with different resources and practicum intensity.

Materials

Instructional and analytical materials were organised into three replicable corpora. First, the policy-curriculum corpus comprised national and institutional documents used to define expected graduate competencies for tourism- and service-oriented programmes (the State Programme for Tourism Development, 2019-2025, and the multilingual education roadmap). These documents were used to operationalise the target communicative domains (customer service, booking procedures, excursion guidance, complaint handling, and negotiation routines) and to justify the selection of language functions relevant to professional performance.

Second, the pedagogical corpus consisted of functional-semantic instructional resources: ESP coursebooks for "Tourism" and "Socio-cultural service", methodological guidelines, and teacher-developed handouts aligned with the functional-semantic framework (i.e., mapping grammatical and lexical forms onto communicative functions). Multimedia materials (audio/video) were included only where they represented workplace-adjacent interactions (reception check-in dialogues, itinerary negotiation, complaint resolution, excursion commentary), enabling repeated exposure to pragmatically realistic language. Third, the authentic professional text corpus comprised naturally occurring written genres used in tourism communication: brochures, hotel and tour descriptions, booking policies, service scripts, and customer-facing terminology lists. These texts were sampled to ensure coverage of the communicative situations targeted in the curriculum mapping

step. Digital platforms (Moodle, Duolingo, Quizlet) were treated as delivery and practice environments rather than primary content sources: Moodle hosted the course units, assessments, and submission workflow; Duolingo provided supplementary individualised grammar-lexis micro-practice; and Quizlet supported spaced retrieval of domain terminology through flashcards and tests.

Procedure

The procedure followed a staged workflow that can be replicated across comparable vocational-higher education settings. Stage 1 (contextual mapping): policy documents and programme standards were collected and used to specify the professional communication competencies expected of tourism and socio-cultural service graduates. This step produced an explicit list of target communicative situations (information provision, service delivery, complaint management, and negotiation) and therefore defined the functional scope of language instruction.

Stage 2 (instructional design and material alignment): the two participating colleges then developed (or adapted) teaching units that matched (a) the programme objectives, (b) the frequency and sequencing of language instruction within the semester structure, and (c) the communicative situations identified in Stage 1. For replicability, units were segmented into analytical subsets by communicative function (requests, apologies, offers, refusals, and service explanations) and by professional domain (accommodation, booking, excursion planning, and conflict resolution).

Stage 3 (functional-semantic and textual analysis): functional-semantic analysis was applied to each subset to identify recurrent lexicalised grammatical patterns, their communicative purposes, and their semantic constraints. In parallel, textual analysis of authentic genres (brochures, hotel descriptions, service scripts) was conducted to locate high-frequency grammatical constructions characteristic of professional discourse (notably modal verbs for politeness/obligation, conditional forms for service options and contingency, and passive constructions for formal service descriptions). These analyses informed the selection of exemplar constructions and the design of practice tasks.

Stage 4 (task implementation through transformational practice): transformational exercises were incorporated as a deliberate instructional component requiring learners to re-express meanings across grammatical alternatives (active/passive alternations, tense shifts, stylistic adjustments, and paraphrase via syntactic synonymy). In replication terms, these tasks operationalise the hypothesised mechanism of change, linguistic flexibility under professional constraints, by systematically requiring form-meaning reconfiguration while maintaining pragmatic appropriateness.

Methods

A multi-method design was employed to ensure that the instructional system can be reproduced and analytically audited. Functional-semantic analysis served as the core method for linking linguistic forms (lexicalised grammar, modality, conditionals, passive voice, politeness formulas) to professional communicative functions in tourism and socio-cultural service scenarios. Semantic analysis was then used to systematise domain terminology and grammatical constructions into thematic-functional fields (accommodation services, booking routines, itinerary negotiation, and complaint resolution), thereby providing an explicit basis for unit construction and vocabulary-grammar integration.

Textual analysis of authentic professional materials (brochures, hotel descriptions, service scripts) identified recurrent discourse patterns and communicative models that represent target genres learners must perform. Task analysis was applied to the transformational activities to specify the linguistic operations required (paraphrase, voice alternation, tense reformulation, register adjustment) and to justify these tasks as a mechanism for developing communicative flexibility rather than rote reproduction. Finally, a comparative curriculum review (Kazakhstan, UK, USA, Sweden) was used to position the intervention within international ESP and vocational language-training practices, allowing the study to articulate which principles are context-specific (policy-driven multilingualism; institutional resource gradients) and which are transferable (function-based sequencing; authenticity of professional genres; transformation-based flexibility training).

Results

Kazakhstan's Education System and Language Policy Context

An adequate interpretation of the present findings requires situating foreign-language instruction within Kazakhstan's broader education architecture and reform agenda. The country operates a unified national system spanning pre-school, general secondary education, technical and vocational education and training, and higher education, with central regulation of state educational standards and qualification requirements. Since the 2000s, higher education has been restructured toward international comparability through a three-cycle degree model and credit-based organisation consistent with the Bologna-inspired trajectory, alongside an expanding quality assurance and accreditation landscape that seeks to strengthen institutional accountability and mobility (National Center for Higher Education Development, 2025; Kireyeva, 2025).

Language education policy constitutes a distinctive systemic feature of this context. The state has promoted a multilingual framework that prioritises Kazakh as the state language, maintains Russian as a language of wider communication, and advances English for internationalisation and labour-market competitiveness. The Roadmap for trilingual education (2015-2020) institutionalised this orientation and stimulated the

incorporation of English into school curricula and professionally oriented programmes, including tourism and service specialisations (Minister of Education and Science..., 2015; Khaldarova & Abdisadyk, 2021). Empirical policy analyses nevertheless document an implementation gap between strategic goals and classroom realities, including uneven regional distribution of qualified teachers and resources, variability in infrastructural capacity, and tensions between top-down policy directives and local pedagogical needs (Imanova et al., 2025; Yelubayeva et al., 2025).

These systemic conditions bear directly on the Results reported below. First, they explain why professionally oriented English instruction in non-linguistic majors frequently combines standardised curricular expectations with institution-specific adaptations shaped by staffing and material provision. Second, they justify the analytical emphasis on functional-semantic structuring: in an environment where multilingual aims are ambitious but implementation conditions are heterogeneous, approaches that reduce cognitive load, strengthen the form-meaning-context link, and provide transferable communicative routines can support more consistent outcomes across diverse settings. Accordingly, the subsection that follows reports the functional-semantic principles and instructional mechanisms in a way that is interpretable against Kazakhstan's policy priorities and institutional constraints.

Theoretical Aspects of Teaching Foreign Language Communication through a Functional and Semantic Approach

The formation of English-language communicative competence among students of non-philological specialties is one of the key aspects of modern foreign language education, which requires the integration of methodological approaches aimed at ensuring effective assimilation of language material. In this context, the functional-semantic approach acts as a methodological basis for learning a professionally oriented foreign language, ensuring correspondence between the structural components of the language and their practical application in real communicative situations (Mizin et al., 2023). The functional-semantic approach is based on considering the language as a system that has certain communicative functions that are implemented through grammatical and lexical means. The functional-semantic approach to foreign language teaching means to distinguish and classify the professionally significant linguistic units that are related to the area of activity of the learners. Foreign language acquisition can only succeed if the context of speech situations in which these linguistic units occur is considered (Medkova, 2020).

The functional-semantic approach to foreign language teaching relies on the following view on language: it is a vehicle conveying meaning that serves certain functions in communication. It emphasises focusing on the language units, their functions and their meaning, which allows learners to organise their foreign language learning instead of mindlessly learning grammatical rules and to value their use in a speech situation

(Llinares & McCabe, 2023). The main principles are the meaning of language units, functional orientation, and interdependence of form, meaning, and context (Table 1).

Table 1

Principles of the Functional-Semantic Approach (on the Example of English)

Name of the Principle	Content	Examples/Practical Importance
Orientation to the meaning of linguistic units	The learning process is aimed at ensuring that the student can identify and use language constructs based on their semantics	Using Past Simple for completed actions in the past (e.g., "I visited Paris last year"), Past Continuous for actions in process (e.g., "I was reading when you called"), Past Perfect for events preceding others (e.g., "She had already left when I arrived"). Using modal verbs to express probability: "must" (high probability), "might" (possibility), "can't" (impossibility)
Functional orientation	Attention is paid to how language units are used to achieve communication goals	Conditional sentence constructions: "If I were you, I would..." (advice); "If it rains, we will cancel the trip" (real conditions). Conversations with clients: "Could you please confirm your reservation?" (polite request); "I apologise for the delay in responding" (formal expression of apology). In the field of tourism: "Can I help you with your luggage?" (practical situation)
Relationship between form, meaning, and context	Language units are examined in specific contexts that illustrate their semantics and functions	Expression "Could you please..." emphasises politeness in business correspondence, while "Can you..." is more suitable for informal communication. Formal and informal greetings: "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen" (formally), "Hi there!" (informally). Using the passive state: "The problem was solved yesterday" (official style)

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Mauitbekova and Bulatbayeva (2024), Qaddumi et al. (2021).

Focusing on the semantics of language units involves focusing on the meaning of words and expressions, which contributes to the accuracy and adequacy of foreign language communication. Functional orientation means that language constructs are used in accordance with their role in specific communication situations, providing practical application of knowledge (Leonow et al., 2019; Romaniuk, 2021). The interdependence of form, meaning and context emphasises the need to consider grammatical structures, lexical features, and the communicative situation, which allows building statements according to the conditions of real speech.

Analysis of lexical and grammatical structures in professional contexts demonstrates that the effectiveness of foreign language communication depends on the ability of students not only to memorise grammatical forms but also to use them in appropriate situations (Pescuma et al., 2023). For example, in the field of tourism and socio-cultural services, language constructions used in scenarios of customer service, organising excursions, or booking services are of particular importance. One of the principles of the functional and semantic approach is the need to structure educational material to meet real situations of professional communication. This means that the language learning process should be focused on functional application in the context of communication acts.

Functional and semantic analysis allows teachers to structure the learning process in such a way as to focus on the meanings and functions of language units in real communication (Bayalieva et al., 2025). This is especially true for students of non-philological specialities who study a foreign language as a tool of professional activity. An example is teaching English to students of the speciality “Tourism”. Here, teachers focus on the language constructs that are most commonly used in customer service. For example, learning how to build polite queries: “Would you mind if I...”, “Could you tell me...” or statements for resolving conflict situations: “Let me clarify this for you”, “I apologise for the inconvenience”. During classes, students learn not only these phrases but also in which contexts they are most appropriate (Encalada & Sarmiento, 2020). Another example is teaching grammatical units with an emphasis on their semantic load. Instead of the traditional memorisation of Passive Voice forms, students are taught to use it to formulate neutral or formal statements: “The issue will be resolved shortly”, which is critical to writing business correspondence in the professional sphere. The practical use of functional and semantic analysis involves the development of educational materials that contain exercises for semantic transformation and variation of statements. For example, students are asked to paraphrase sentences using synonymous grammatical constructions or compose sentences based on the suggested vocabulary (Sarvinoz, 2022). The process of semantic analysis should include the following stages: consideration of lexical units in context; analysis of differences between synonymous expressions; determination of the influence of context on the use of certain grammatical structures. For example, in customer service, it is important to correctly interpret forms of politeness depending on the level of formality of speech (Romaniuk & Yavorska, 2022). Students should be trained to recognise the level of formality in phrases such as “Can I help you?” (informal) and “How may I assist you?” (formal) to communicate effectively in a professional environment.

In the contemporary teaching of foreign languages to learners of non-philological specialities, innovative ways of organising the material to be learnt are a matter of special significance (Salkynbay & Anarbekova, 2020; Isenalieva et al., 2023). One of the major ways in which learners are trained in the effective use of the language resources in their professional activities. Techniques include working on speech variability, grammatical automatism and vocabulary richness. These techniques include syntactic synonymy, transformational exercises and semantic fields.

Syntactic synonymy refers to the fact that the form rather than the meaning of a sentence can be transformed. In the case of tourism, “The hotel provides guests with free Wi-Fi” has a syntactic equivalent in “Free Wi-Fi is provided to guests by the hotel” or “Guests are provided with free Wi-Fi by the hotel”. The text of a sentence is aimed at transformation exercises that require a grammatical change to a statement and its deliberate reproduction. Transformations may include passive form versus active (“The guide informed the tourists of the itinerary” – “The itinerary was informed to the tourists by

the guide”), variations in tense (“The hotel manager will arrange transport” – “The hotel manager has arranged transport”), and even speech that is both direct vs. indirect (“She said: ‘The museum opens at 9 o’clock’” – “She said that the museum opened at 9 o’clock”). The usefulness of being presented with such exercises is that it helps make a speaker adaptable in shaping their speech according to the context in which they are speaking. To facilitate memorization and correct usage, the semantic field method groups vocabulary according to different topics. For example, students encounter expressions such as “single room”, “double room”, “suite”, “reservation”, “check-in” and “amenities” in the semantic field “Accommodation.” This structured approach helps students better assimilate their vocabulary and create more coherent, logically organized statements. In addition, the functional-semantic approach helps develop linguistic and sociocultural skills. Students not only learn words, but also learn how to use them correctly, taking into account cultural norms and communicative goals. For example, learning neutral and formal expressions from different cultures reduces the risk of misunderstandings in the world.

Lexicalised grammatical material, i.e., language constructions that combine lexical and grammatical components, is instrumental in the formation of foreign language communicative competence. Within the framework of the functional-semantic approach, this material is considered as a means of providing a connection between language units and their semantic functions. Its use is aimed at activating semantic units in the communication process, which is especially important for professionally oriented foreign language teaching (Bakirova, 2020).

Lexicalised grammatical material has an integrated nature: it combines the lexical basis (for example, words, stable expressions) with grammatical structures (for example, verb forms, syntactic constructions) (Table 2). This allows creating communication-rich speech patterns that make it easier to understand and use the language in real-world situations (Pappas, 2020).

The use of contextually oriented tasks in the process of teaching a foreign language allows students to develop communicative competence because they learn not only to reproduce language constructions but also to adapt them to specific situations. Effective assimilation of language structures is possible only if they are integrated into typical communication situations (Horwitz, 2020). For tourism professionals, it is essential to be able to negotiate with customers, explain booking details, and organize itineraries that are tailored to the needs of tourists.

The use of semantic analysis in language teaching enables in-depth learning of lexical-grammatical material. This implies meaning-centred, use-centred courses that focus on function. Modular courses with a semantic analysis component are the core of the functional-semantic approach. In the modular course of “hotel customer service”,

semantic analysis of the phrase “Would you like to upgrade your room?” is combined with practice in polite and conditional forms (Qaddumi et al., 2021).

Table 2

Aspects of Using Lexicalised Grammatical Material

Aspect	Content	Examples/Explanations
Linking to the context	Lexicalised language units combine lexical and grammatical information, making them applicable in specific professional situations	“Could you recommend a local attraction?”; “We apologise for the inconvenience caused by the delay”
Reducing cognitive load	Ready-made language blocks simplify communication by reducing the need to build sentences from scratch, allowing students to focus on the content	“May I have your attention, please?”; “Is there anything else I can assist you with?”
Activating semantic units through repetition and variation	Variation and paraphrasing tasks help students gain a deeper understanding of the semantics of language units and use them in different contexts	Paraphrasing: “We regret to inform you that...” – “Unfortunately, we must let you know that...”; Adding elements: “This tour includes...” – “This exclusive tour package also includes...”
Generalisation through categorisation	Lexicalised phrases generalise semantic phenomena, helping choose the appropriate language tools depending on the level of formality	Formal: “We deeply regret any inconvenience this may have caused”; Informal: “Sorry for the trouble!”

Source: Compiled by the authors based on Ridel (2023); Takuova et al. (2024).

Identifying meaning tasks also lends itself well to teaching meaning analysis. Students read a text with meanings expressed in alternative ways and have to choose the most sensible one, e.g., “I’m afraid we’re fully booked” or “There might be a room available”. This activity helps students understand the role of context in meaning changes (Maulana et al., 2020).

Project work is also a resource: the students compile their own “phrase books” by role-playing authentic communicative situations in the professions. For the Tourism specialism, phrases might be for tour presentations (“This guided tour covers the most iconic landmarks of the city”) or for communicating with clients (“We’ll ensure your stay is as comfortable as possible”). Initiatives like this promote a creative approach to learning the language input.

The use of multimedia resources such as interactive simulations, instructional videos, and audio recordings of real-life dialogues is also an effective method for improving semantic analysis (Orlov, 2025). Videos featuring dialogues that take place in real-world settings, such as hotels or airports, allow students to learn key phrases, their meanings, and how they help achieve communication goals. Using contextual tasks to assess knowledge allows you to evaluate how well students have mastered the lexical material. Simulating professional situations, role-playing, analyzing real texts, filling out forms and

documents, conducting business correspondence, interpreting and translating specialized texts, and integrating grammatical and lexical structures into professional communication scenarios are examples of contextual tasks (Kachkynov & Asipova, 2025). For example, students are presented with a situation in which a customer is dissatisfied with the services they receive. You must apologize, offer a solution, and end the conversation on a positive note. Such tasks demonstrate the level of understanding of language units and the ability to use them in real-life situations (Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021).

The introduction of semantic analysis into educational programs has many advantages. Among them are that it helps students develop flexibility in speech by teaching them to use expressive means according to the context; increases confidence in communication as they master fixed language structures; and increases motivation through interesting and realistic tasks. All of this contributes to professional development and effective learning (Sudipa et al., 2020).

World Experience in Teaching a Professionally Oriented Foreign Language

The development of language competence in students of non-philological disciplines, particularly in the field of tourism and sociocultural services, is an integral part of their preparation for professional activity in an international environment. In this case, English is an important communication tool that enables effective interaction, information transfer, and the provision of high-quality services.

In European countries such as the United Kingdom and Sweden, special programs have been developed for those planning to work in the tourism and hotel industry. In the UK, the Confederation of Tourism offers courses in English for Tourism and Hospitality (CTH Level 1 Certificate, 2025), which cover the vocabulary and grammar needed for booking, hotel management, guest services, and tour organization. These courses are based on practical methods: students practice interacting with customers through role-playing games and analyze real materials such as menus, guidebooks, and travel schedules. In Sweden, professional English is taught in modules (English for Hotels and..., 2025). For example, one of the modules is devoted to conducting excursions and includes mastering the relevant vocabulary ("landmark," "cultural heritage"), grammatical models for describing plans ("Tomorrow we will visit the castle"), and skills for presenting tourist routes.

Voxy is an American educational platform that offers a variety of courses teaching people how to use English in a professional environment. Courses such as "English for Tourism & Hospitality" (2025) include sections on customer communication, conflict resolution, travel management, and presentation of travel services. For example, while studying the topic "Booking and Reservation", students learn how to work with customer requests:

“Could you confirm the reservation for a double room with a sea view?”, “I’m afraid there is no availability for the selected dates, but we can offer...”

Attention is also paid to cross-cultural communication because the US tourism sector is focused on a multinational audience. Students analyse cultural features of communication, in particular, polite forms of requests and refusals (“Would you mind if we change the schedule slightly?”).

Information platforms such as Moodle, Duolingo, and Quizlet play an important role in improving foreign language communication by offering a variety of tools for effective learning. Moodle is a free-to-use open-source learning management system that schools use for distance and blended learning. Teachers can use Moodle to create courses, upload learning content and assess students’ knowledge, and there is self-paced learning that you can track, manage and set the communication loops for all parties.

Duolingo is a popular language-learning tool and uses gamification to teach its users. The lessons become more complex and are built to teach reading, writing, listening, and speaking competencies. Learners can, effectively, learn new vocabulary and grammar rules thanks to the interactive activities and instant feedback sessions. You can use the Quizlet application to develop interactive flashcards for learning vocabulary terms. It allows you to test the spelling, sound, and definition of a word using tests, games, and group activities. All of these tools are learner-centred, which means that they allow students to take charge of their learning and ensure that they become masters of the content in their own time and in the way in which they prefer. They promote autonomy and effectiveness in learning foreign languages (Morar et al., 2021).

The various types of interactive methods of language teaching can also be compared to the traditional forms of approach that are often used in the education of languages to non-linguists. The most apparent difference between interactive and traditional methods is that traditional methods are often based upon passive forms of learning, such as through lectures, memorising grammar rules, and writing exercises (Bazaluk, 2017; 2018). In contrast, interactive methods require the active participation of students and focus upon the real-world use of the language that is being taught.

Interactive activities like role-playing, pair work, and discussion of case studies and scenarios, as well as the use of digital platforms for assignments, have a higher level of student motivation (Digout & Samra, 2023). For instance, assignments that target the use of a foreign language in a realistic scenario in the tourism field, such as speaking to a customer upon their arrival at the hotel in question or presenting a tourism itinerary, contribute to the increased value of these tasks in boosting the confidence of these students in their communication abilities. Interactive methods additionally improve students’ retention of vocabulary and grammar rules by placing the educational material

into context; for instance, platforms like Quizlet can be used to tailor assignments based upon the students' levels of mastery. While traditional methods often neglect individual characteristics, interactive approaches allow students to learn the material at their own pace.

Analysis of Kazakhstan's Experience in the Context of a Functional and Semantic Approach Language training of non-philological specialists in Kazakhstan, especially in the tourism and socio-cultural services, is an important component of the modern educational system. This process reflects the integration of international standards, a functional-semantic approach, and national initiatives aimed at improving students' professional competence. The functional-semantic approach began to be applied in the language education of Kazakhstan in the early 2000s. Universities and colleges have focused on creating disciplines that provide students with the knowledge and skills needed for professional communication.

As part of the Trilingualism initiative (Minister of Education and Science..., 2015; Grigoriev, 2021), implemented by the Government of Kazakhstan, English has become an important component of educational programmes (Khaldarova & Abdisadyk, 2021). Fluency in Kazakh, Russian, and English contributes to the competitiveness of graduates in the international labour market. Special courses aimed at developing communicative competence in professional settings have been created for students of non-philological specialities. For example, these courses cover cross-cultural communication, business correspondence, and customer service conflict resolution.

The state programme for tourism development (2019-2025) (Resolution of the Government..., 2019) aimed to create modern infrastructure and train personnel for the industry. Special attention was paid to the language training of specialists in the field of tourism. The programme provided for the introduction of modern methods of teaching foreign languages, in particular, through the development of new curricula and advanced training of teachers.

The Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism is a leading educational institution specialising in training specialists in the field of tourism. The discipline "Professionally oriented foreign language" includes interactive classes aimed at developing skills in the practical use of the English language. Students master topics such as booking, conducting excursions, customer service, and preparing advertising materials. During the "Hotel service" module, students learn the phrases necessary to work at the reception: *"Your room is ready. Please let us know if you need any assistance"*. The module "Excursion activities" focuses on vocabulary related to cultural heritage: *"This historical site attracts thousands of tourists annually"*. The academy also uses multimedia resources that allow students to analyse authentic dialogues and gain experience working in real-world settings.

In the context of training non-philological specialists in Kazakhstan, especially in tourism and socio-cultural services, foreign language training programmes are focused on the development of practical communication skills. The development of professional foreign language competence is ensured through the use of a functional-semantic approach, which focuses on the use of language structures in real work situations. Foreign language training for specific purposes is aimed at enabling students to use grammatical structures appropriately in accordance with the specifics of their future professional activities (Lukyanenko, 2024). For example, in the field of tourism, conditional sentences are important for communicating with customers: “If you visit Almaty in the spring, you will enjoy the beautiful apple blossoms”. Passive constructions help to describe services: “Breakfast is served from 7 to 10 a.m.”. Mastering such models makes communication with international tourists more clear and professional.

To develop language competence, tasks are created that are aimed at activating semantic units and improving the ability to use language in various communicative situations. Among such techniques is syntactic synonymy, which involves rephrasing sentences while preserving their meaning but changing their grammatical structure. For example: “The guide provided detailed information about the monument” can be transformed into “Detailed information about the monument was provided by the guide”.

Transformational exercises are also widely used, requiring changes in word form or sentence structure depending on the situation. This can be a transition from active to passive voice or a change in tense. For example, the active sentence “The hotel manager will arrange the transportation” can be converted to a passive form: “The transportation will be arranged by the hotel manager”.

Most universities in Kazakhstan offer courses aimed at teaching professionally oriented foreign languages. For example, Turan University (Almaty) trains specialists for the tourism and service sectors as part of its Tourism program and provides internships at travel companies and hotels. The International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkestan specializes in tourism, hospitality, catering, and sports. The University of International Business in Almaty implements the Sustainable Tourism program, which is aimed at future tourism professionals and researchers in this field. All of these educational institutions actively integrate foreign language learning into their professional training, which enables students to work successfully with international partners and clients, understand cultural contexts, and provide a high level of services. To provide a comprehensive and structured overview of the obtained results, the main findings were systematised and summarised in Table 3.

Table 3*Summative Classification of the Main Findings of the Study*

Block of Analysis	Key Findings	Examples	Implications for Teaching Professionally Oriented FL
1. Theoretical aspects of the functional-semantic approach	Language units must be taught through meaning, function, and context; semantic analysis strengthens comprehension; lexicalised grammatical material reduces cognitive load.	Use of modal verbs based on communicative function; passive forms for formal statements; semantic fields such as Accommodation; syntactic synonymy and transformational exercises.	Supports conscious language use; increases adaptability of speech; enhances accuracy and appropriateness in professional communication.
2. World experience (UK, Sweden, USA)	Global programmes emphasise practice-based learning, role-plays, simulations, multimodal resources (Moodle, Duolingo, Quizlet).	UK CTH courses; Swedish modular courses for tourism; Voxy's English for Tourism & Hospitality; use of real-world materials (menus, guidebooks, booking forms).	Confirms the value of interactive and contextualised learning; demonstrates that digital tools increase personalisation and autonomy.
3. Kazakhstan's experience (tourism and socio-cultural services)	Integration of the trilingual policy; growth of professionally oriented courses; emphasis on functional-semantic tasks such as paraphrasing, transformations, and contextual dialogues.	Modules at Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism (Hotel Service; Excursion Activities); passive and conditional structures in tourism scenarios; use of multimedia and authentic professional dialogues.	Shows the relevance of aligning language training with industry needs; demonstrates that functional-semantic structuring strengthens communicative readiness of students for real workplace situations.
Cross-cutting patterns	The functional-semantic approach increases communicative flexibility and supports professionally oriented competence; transformational tasks play a decisive role.	Transfer from active → passive voice; selection of appropriate formulas of politeness; context-based phrase choice.	Provides a methodological basis for designing curricula, course modules, and assessment tools centred on real professional tasks.

Discussion

Although the results of the study indicate that the functional-semantic method contributes to the development of professional communication in a foreign language, a more detailed study reveals the processes that shape these results. The method proves to be effective because it links grammatical and lexical structures to professionally specific contexts, thus transforming theoretical content into practical communication skills. This perspective is consistent with Garcia-Gamés and Masiso (2022), who focus more on cognitive processing than on functional application. The contrast between the studies suggests that contextual activation of semantic and grammatical units can enhance communicative competence not only by improving memory and attention to vocabulary, but also through their meaningful use in professional communication. Because students are forced to reorganise and apply structures dynamically rather than statically when they engage with language in assignments that mimic real-world

workplace circumstances, the current results highlight those communicative benefits occur.

On transformational tasks, their cognitive and functional traits also account for the enhanced performance. In addition to practicing transformations, students showed flexibility because these tasks necessitated constant form and meaning shifting, which improves procedural knowledge. This study shows that repeated exposure to different communicative situations allows learners to develop structural flexibility in language use. This differs from the conclusions of Sermsook et al. (2021), who explained the linguistic difficulties of hotel staff mainly by their limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. In other words, the transformation measures were successful because they recreated pressure to rethink meaning while maintaining pragmatic clarity, which is an extremely important skill for tourism-related professions.

Recognizing how thematic lexical fields support categorization processes further emphasizes the role of semantic analysis in strengthening the acquisition of professional vocabulary. Semantic grouping allowed students to build interconnected lexical networks and reduce cognitive load, leading to deeper mastery of specialized vocabulary (Skliarenko et al., 2019). This explains why the thematic organization mentioned by Kelmendi and Hysenaj (2024) had a particularly strong impact on this study. According to our findings, grammatical-semantic structuring offers an additional level that contributes to more effective search and adaptation of language units during communication, while these authors largely explain student progress through cultural orientation and intercultural communication. Semantic structuring improves functional efficiency, while cultural orientation promotes contextual appropriateness – an important distinction.

Another factor that significantly influenced the results was the reconstruction of authentic professional scenarios. Students achieved improvement not only because such scenarios increased their motivation, as Mesquita (2021) suggests, but also because the simulations required them to manage unpredictable communicative situations (complaints, explanations, negotiations) that require quick choices of linguistic resources. This suggests that improvements in communicative competence are partly due to the ecological validity of the tasks: when classroom activities resemble real-life workplace interactions, learners become more resilient to communicative pressure and more capable of transferring classroom knowledge to new professional contexts. The improvement in highly specific skills in this study was more pronounced than in broader studies of tourism training, which can be explained theoretically.

From the perspective of functional grammar, it is also possible to understand the significant impact that transformational grammar tasks have on speech adaptation (Volkov, 2025). To perform transformational tasks, learners must assign meaning to

unfamiliar syntactic patterns, activating both pragmatic thinking and linguistic awareness. Grammatical flexibility is equally important in professional communication, as it allows for adjustments in tone, formality, and precision, skills that are essential when interacting with international clients. This contrasts with the findings of Hasrul et al. (2021), who identified lexical relevance as the main factor influencing communicative effectiveness.

Tasks based on semantic fields proved effective because they align professional schemas and meaning-based categories with lexical input. When students interacted with semantic clusters, they perceived language as a set of tools related to communicative intentions (handling complaints or providing services) rather than as separate elements. This helps explain why their performance improved even in unfamiliar situations. The results show that, when applied systematically, traditional semantic analysis can offer advantages similar to those of personalized learning with artificial intelligence, in particular by supporting learners' ability to independently activate relevant language units (Zhai & Wibowo, 2023).

Another important finding was that personalization enabled students to place grammatical and semantic material in the context of their own communicative goals and career aspirations. Students are more likely to memorize and use language structures when they see them as directly supporting their personal goals. This reflects the cognitive mechanism of meaningful relevance, which explains why such personalized tasks led to improved results. Although multilingual structure is credited by Supartini and Agustini (2021) with effective learning, this study shows that professional relevance may be an equally potent motivator and retention factor.

Taken together, the results demonstrate not only the effectiveness of the functional-semantic approach, but also clarify the mechanisms underlying its impact. Its pedagogical value derives from the systematic reduction of cognitive load through carefully organised lexical-grammatical patterns; the enhanced ecological validity of tasks that simulate authentic workplace communication; the activation of interconnected semantic networks facilitating rapid retrieval of domain-specific vocabulary; the provision of opportunities for grammatical reformulation that strengthen pragmatic flexibility; and the construction of personalised learning trajectories that render language functions meaningful and memorable. The integration of professional, structural, and semantic dimensions produces a synergistic effect, leading to measurable improvements in communicative competence rather than the isolated benefits of a single methodological principle. These findings substantiate the rationale for further research into technical and cross-cultural adaptations of the approach, including the potential of AI-supported modelling of professional communication to extend its applicability and analytical precision.

Conclusion

The study confirmed that the functional-semantic approach effectively contributes to the formation of foreign language communicative competence in students of non-linguistic programs. Theoretical analysis showed that the inclusion of lexical and grammatical elements in teaching improves students' language proficiency and aligns their training with the practical professional context. The main principle of the approach is to focus on the meanings and functions of language units, which contributes to a more conscious assimilation of language material.

The study found that lexicalised grammatical information reduces cognitive burden and improves professional language use. Semantic transformation, linguistic unit manipulation, and vocabulary thematic grouping enabled students grasp and use linguistic structures in near-authentic communication. At the same time, however, an analysis of Kazakhstan's experience makes it imperative to include a functional-semantic approach in the curriculum. The trilingualism policy and the state policies for the sphere of tourism have made sure of the establishment of a modern language training system in Kazakhstan that is in line with global trends and the needs of the learners in practice.


The arguments presented here lend themselves also to the argument that transformational exercises (paraphrasing, transformation of phrase structures, transforming linguistic material to communicative situations, etc.) are an effective tool for achieving speech flexibility. By completing these exercises, learners make a conscious effort to internalise grammatical structures for professional use in their speech. This is a vote of confidence in educational technologies that allow for the modelling of real-life communicative encounters in the language training settings.


The practical importance of the research is to develop an effective approach to the preparation of lexicalised grammatical material, which contributes to the formation of professionally oriented foreign language competence of students of non-philological specialities. The created system can be implemented in educational programmes to improve the quality of teaching disciplines focused on professional communication. The use of the functional-semantic approach allowed students to acquire language material more deeply, apply it in real communicative contexts, and adapt it to the needs of specific professional sectors. It also increased their readiness for intercultural interaction and broadened their professional outlook, which is crucial in a globalized world.


A limitation of this study was its focus on English as the main means of international communication, which does not consider the specific features of other foreign languages that may be important for professional activities in the field of tourism and socio-cultural services. In addition, the study analysed only certain grammatical and semantic aspects of communication, while other linguistic factors, such as pragmatics or sociolinguistic features, require further examination.


The study found that artificial intelligence platforms and multimedia resources could promote interactive learning. Digital tools can make foreign language learning more customised and successful. Tourism and socio-cultural services students need better cross-cultural communication challenges, thus future study may focus on them. Training programs that consider language and culture will equip specialists for a globalised workforce.


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The authors used the AI tool ChatGPT (developed by OpenAI) for English language editing, including grammar refinement and sentence structure adjustments. The authors take full responsibility for the content and interpretations presented in this manuscript.

Ethics Declarations

World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki–Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Participants

All procedures performed in the study were in accordance with the World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Helsinki, the ethical principles to conduct any medical research involving human participants.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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