

## Article

# Online Communication Tools in Teaching Foreign Languages for Education Sustainability

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**Citation:** Martyshev, N.; Shutaleva, A.; Malushko, E.; Nikonova, Z.; Savchenko, I. Online Communication Tools in Teaching Foreign Languages for Education Sustainability. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 11127. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131911127>

Academic Editors: Waleed Mugahed Al-Rahmi and Qusay Al-Maatouk

Received: 27 August 2021  
Accepted: 6 October 2021  
Published: 8 October 2021

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**Abstract:** Higher education curricula are developed based on creating conditions for implementing many professional and universal competencies. In Russia, one of the significant competencies for a modern specialist is business communication in oral and written forms in the Russian language and a foreign language. Therefore, teaching students to write in a foreign language is one of the modern requirements for young specialists' professional training. This article aimed to study the tools of online communication that are used in teaching foreign languages. The article presents the results of an empirical study and analysis of factors of application of online communication technologies in foreign languages teaching, synchronous and asynchronous means used in online learning, and the advantages of integrating online communication tools into the educational process of teaching a foreign language. The study of the advantages and disadvantages of educational platforms is based on an analysis of information and online communication technologies used in the educational process. Based on the example of teaching a foreign language, the article shows how online communication platforms are involved in the educational process. Furthermore, the teachers' and students' opinions are presented on how online platforms are convenient. The survey involved 928 first-year students and 76 foreign language teachers of Volgograd State University (Volgograd), Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (Nizhny Novgorod), Tomsk Polytechnic University (Tomsk), Ural Federal University, named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin (Ekaterinburg). It was revealed that the integration of online communication tools has positive effects on the formation and development of written communication skills.

**Keywords:** e-learning; online communication; teaching foreign languages; educational platforms

## 1. Introduction

The sustainable development of a society assumes that education is the foundation for creating a more sustainable society of people and integrating sustainable development in the education system at all its levels. Education is both a socio-cultural interaction between a teacher and a student and joint information and communication activities, which are transferred to the electronic environment thanks to information and digital technologies. The socially informational nature of education is the basis of the modern conceptual model

of education, which is associated with the surrounding information environment, especially when immersed in the global internet space.

Education sustainability allows people to acquire the values, competencies, skills, and knowledge necessary to participate in social activities. In Russia, Federal state educational standards for higher education for the preparation of bachelors, specialists, and masters include many universal competencies [1]. One of the significant competencies of a modern specialist is the ability to communicate in oral and written forms in Russian and foreign languages. The most important component of professional competence is the literacy of written communication, the ability of a specialist to draw up the necessary documentation following all the rules and requirements. For higher education, an important task is to train students to communicate in a foreign language in writing, both in the academic and professional fields.

This article is devoted to studying the tools of online communication that are used in teaching foreign languages. The growing use of online communication tools in teaching in general and learning a foreign language indicates a technological update of the learning process.

This study assumes that teaching foreign languages is harmoniously implemented when using online communication tools. Several Russian universities' examples show how online communication platforms are involved in the educational process and how convenient online platforms are in teachers' and students' opinions. Significant issues for discussion are the following:

What are the factors driving the use of information and communication technologies in education?

What are the means of synchronous and asynchronous online communication that are used in the process of teaching a foreign language?

What are the advantages of integrating online communication tools into the educational process of teaching a foreign language?

Online education is explored from various perspectives on the learning process [2–4]. Students are often less satisfied with online classes than face-to-face classes. However, the criteria for assessing the achievement of learning outcomes is a starting point for the education process. Nguyen [5] and Ni [6] argue that there is a relative equivalence between full-time education and distance learning using an online environment. However, the question of how teachers and students perceive the prospects for online education is open. The perception of the learning process is conditioned by (1) factors that relate to the organization of the learning process by the teacher, (2) the willingness of the learners to learn, and (3) the conditions that can lead to increased teaching efficiency.

Nowadays, the computer and the internet are tools for achieving social, educational, and professional goals. Working with computers and the internet requires students and teachers to know information and digital literacy [4,7,8]. H. Jenkins focuses on the social dimensions of new literacy [9]. Effective communication between people is expressed because a person can read, write, and communicate in an electronic environment effectively, create and use digital technologies, search and exchange information, and maintain communication with other people in everyday professional spheres [9]. Online communication tools allow language education to go beyond the classroom. Information and digital literacy make it possible for students to communicate with native speakers in real-time. Virtual communication, reading news, watching movies, and listening to books in a foreign language are attractive options for mastering a foreign language. Online communication tools allow students to immerse themselves in an environment close to that of an authentic environment. Moreover, students often view online communication as a safe environment for self-expression and learning [10,11].

According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978), students' and teachers' interactions and the students themselves are essential components of the learning process. Therefore, synchronous and asynchronous communication methods in the process of teaching a foreign language are of particular importance. The educational process includes many forms of online communication between teachers and students. The main ways of

communication are email, forum, chat, social network, blog. Electronic mail is a technology and its services for sending and receiving electronic messages over a computer network.

The principle of email operation practically repeats the paper mail system: mail, letter, envelope, attachment, box, delivery, and other terms.

Forums are a class of web applications that organizes communication between website visitors. Teachers and students can create their topics in the forum and discuss them by posting messages inside these threads. The convenience of using forums lies in the fact that questions, answers, and poll results are saved in the forum database. In the future, this information can be accessed by forum participants, other students studying the discipline, and other internet users interested in the questions presented in the form.

Chat is convenient for organizing the educational process, as it allows the teacher and students to implement real-time messaging over a computer network. This feature of the chat makes it an effective tool in the work of a teacher during classes in a distant format. Chat is a means of communication between students and teachers in real-time or close to it. On the forum, a student or teacher, having written a question, can wait for someone to answer it. The response time may or may not be limited. In the chat, communication occurs only with those who are present in it now. However, chat results may not be saved. This circumstance forces the teacher to coordinate online communication tools with the set goals and teaching schedule.

A social network is a platform, online service, or website, the purpose of which is to build and organize social relationships. Social networks have been gaining popularity in the teaching process since 1995 with the emergence of the American portal Classmates.com (accessed on 15 May 2021). A significant time in developing social networks in the educational process is 2003–2004, when LinkedIn, MySpace, and Facebook were launched.

A blog is a networking environment with several advantages over email, web forums, and chat rooms. A blog is an online diary in which information is available to third-party users, not just the author. The ability to discuss blog entries in the comments, approve or criticize them can be implemented in the form of text, audio, or video clips.

Online communication tools allow students and teachers to communicate in real-time during classes in a distant format. Many researchers consider the types of synchronous communication as a means of mutual support and mutual assistance [12,13]. Chat is one example of synchronous communication with effective management. Chat has a synchronous nature, as all students are together in a virtual room simultaneously. Research on asynchronous online communication raises teacher-student interaction issues [14,15] and the relationship between student interaction and student learning dynamics [13,16,17]. When studying a foreign language, the internet provides access to various resources, which diversifies learning opportunities. Studies of the web environment for language learning [18,19] show that online communication transforms teaching practices and influences learning. Colaric and Jonassen [20] address the educational context's role in making foreign language learning genuinely helpful.

People's access to information on the internet is growing exponentially [21,22]. Access to information and learning resources on the internet reduces the digital divide between individuals from different countries [23]. Researchers [24,25] are addressing issues of equity in access to education by exploring ways to educate people with disabilities who need special educational conditions. At the same time, online learning makes the following issues relevant: self-control of students, independent choice of a comfortable place and time of the study [26], as well as various issues of a psychological nature [27,28], and ethical issues [29,30].

For several decades, the education system has aimed to integrate information and communication technologies into the educational process. This trend is especially pronounced in the modern world educational space. In the field of mass online education, many projects of various levels of educational degree are being implemented, for example, Coursera ([coursera.org](https://www.coursera.org), accessed on 10 June 2021), Skytech ([skytech-helicopters.com](https://www.skytech-helicopters.com), accessed on 10 June 2021), edX ([edx.org](https://www.edx.org), accessed on 10 June 2021), Udacity ([udacity.com](https://www.udacity.com),

accessed on 10 June 2021), MIT OpenCourseWare ([ocw.mit.edu](https://ocw.mit.edu), accessed on 10 June 2021), Skyteach (<https://skyteach.ru/>, accessed on 10 June 2021), Zillion ([zillion.net](https://zillion.net), accessed on 10 June 2021), Eduson ([eduson.tv](https://eduson.tv), accessed on 10 June 2021), Uniweb ([uniweb.ru](https://uniweb.ru), accessed on 10 June 2021), Digital October ([coursera.digitaloctober.ru](https://coursera.digitaloctober.ru), accessed on 10 June 2021), University in your pocket ([moyuniver.ru](https://moyuniver.ru), accessed on 10 June 2021), Get2Know ([get2know.ru](https://get2know.ru), accessed on 10 June 2021), Eclass ([eclass.cc](https://eclass.cc), accessed on 10 June 2021), and other projects.

World universities included in the Top 100 of the world rankings are often the flagships of online education development, setting the tone and direction for further development for the rest of the educational community [31,32]. One of these universities is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In March 2016, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology released a massive library of courses, curricula, textbooks, notes, and cheat sheets, making them publicly available [33]. This library includes basic and auxiliary audio and video lectures, simulations, visualizations, online textbooks, and presentations with subtitles [34]. Some sections are accompanied by tasks and their solutions in pdf format. This event was a decisive step towards the development of internet education. Courses and materials are regularly updated in real-time. Courses can be helpful for anthropology, computer science, bioinformatics, architecture and design, social sciences, and languages. Also, courses and materials are helpful for teachers. The MIT website has a relatively large section for teaching staff and future teachers who work in the education system. One of the important distinguishing features of these courses is that some of the courses are translated into languages other than English, such as Chinese, Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and German. However, Russian speakers will have to choose a language from the list, as no translation into Russian has yet been offered. During the 2019–2020 pandemic, Coursera was another popular mass online education project. Coursera entered many educational institutions, which suggested that their students turn to these courses (<https://www.coursera.org/>, accessed on 10 June 2021). Coursera is impressive for its diverse thematic courses provided by partner universities from Russia and abroad. Since 2012, this project has earned many users' loyalty with the ability to get limited or completely free access to the course materials. However, exams and documents, as well as some private or mega-popular courses, remained paid.

The Skyteach project (<https://skyteach.ru/>, accessed on 10 June 2021), which Russian authors are developing as an open community of English language teachers, looks quite interesting. The Skyteach project brings together English language teachers. This project is a knowledge library and information portal. This portal presents ESL news, current methods, original ideas, and teachers' experience in organizing lessons. In addition, it contains helpful teaching articles, assignments, tests, and other developments in the English language. InternetUrok.ru also became a helpful resource for schools. InternetUrok.ru offered full-fledged video lessons on many main subjects of the school curriculum and notes, small exercises, simulators, and automated tests. Similar work is underway in the Russian Federation. In addition, many universities develop their distance learning systems and use standard ones, such as the Moodle system, Microsoft Teams, iSping, and other platforms.

Modern society is faced with a pandemic of the coronavirus infection COVID-19, which directly affects the world's education system. In 2020, international society unexpectedly faced the all-consuming epidemic of the coronavirus COVID-19 and plunged into protracted self-isolation. As a result, educational institutions worldwide were forced to switch to remote online learning. As such, the effective use of online communication tools has taken center stage in much of the research and the list of everyday pedagogical tasks. Moreover, during the pandemic, schools and universities were temporarily closed. This circumstance leads to the need to study the role distance education means in teaching disciplines.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The growing use of online communication tools in teaching in general and learning a foreign language, in particular, indicates a technological update of the learning process.

The information and communication technologies in teaching ensure the sustainability of education, which educational institutions have demonstrated during the period of isolation due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This article is devoted to studying the means of online communication that are used in teaching foreign languages.

This study is based on the theoretical analysis of pedagogical and psychological literature, analysis of monographic works, and articles reflecting the results of using online communication methods in the learning process. Literary reviews were used in this study to explore international and Russian theory and practice of using online communication tools in teaching practice.

The objective of this article is an empirical study of the satisfaction of teachers and students with the use of information and communication technologies. This study is necessary because students' satisfaction with the process and learning outcomes will largely determine their further intention to continue their studies at an educational institution.

The empirical part of this study included identifying information and communication platforms that teachers used to organize and support the learning process. The platform's choice depended on the capabilities of the educational institution in technical and economic terms, as well as on the teacher's personal preferences and the requirements for supporting the lesson and its tasks. Therefore, the issue of using educational communication platforms is related only to foreign language teachers.

At the first stage of the study, we used structured interviews and examined the most numerous statements that could be determined as students' opinions about online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey involved students and teachers from the following universities that are significant for the development of Russian regions: Volgograd State University (Volgograd), Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (Nizhny Novgorod), Tomsk Polytechnic University (Tomsk), Ural Federal University, named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin (Ekaterinburg). These universities are examples of important centers of the focus of innovative, technological, and social development of the regions of Russia.

In total, 928 first-year students studying foreign languages were interviewed using a Google Forms questionnaire. At the same time, the students studying in non-linguistic higher education programs:

- 250 students are from Volgograd State University;
- 450 students are from Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod;
- 150 students are from Tomsk Polytechnic University;
- 78 students are from Ural Federal University.

Seventy-six foreign language teachers took part in the study. They were interviewed using a Google Forms questionnaire:

- 15 teachers are from Volgograd State University;
- 35 teachers are from the Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod;
- 16 teachers are from Tomsk Polytechnic University;
- 10 teachers are from Ural Federal University.

The structured interview contained questions that determined our subject of interest and, thus, narrowed the range of potential responses. Students and teachers were asked questions about whether the learning outcomes were achieved, their satisfaction with communication in the learning process and the technical competence of the learning process, and how comfortable it is.

Students and teachers were asked the following questions:

- adaptation of students and teachers to the new conditions of distance learning;
- timely informing students and teachers about changes in the process of distance learning;
- how convenient is the distance learning mode;
- change in the level of motivation to work in the framework of the remote form;
- how informative is the educational portal of the university;
- whether the learning outcomes have been achieved;

- are the participants in the educational process satisfied with the communication in the learning process and the technical competence of the educational process;
- how comfortable is the distance learning process;
- difficulties of distance education;
- the benefits of distance education.

In this study, goals were set for the questionnaire, the implementation of which implies the designation of the conditions for the effective use of online communication tools in teaching foreign languages. The authors of the article explained the questions to students and teachers before the start of their questionnaire in order to make sure that all the questions were perceived correctly and that they were understandable to the respondents. The authors of the article accompanied the respondents when answering the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were anonymous, allowing the respondents to feel comfortable and answer as openly as possible to the proposed questions.

After the completion of the survey, the questionnaires were checked for accuracy and completeness. Five of the student questionnaires were not completed by 30%. These questionnaires were rejected and were not subject to processing.

The remaining questionnaires went through the coding process, which means that each answer option in the questionnaire is assigned a code. Each question of the questionnaire was considered as a specific measuring instrument for fixing the answer. For statistical processing of the questionnaires, the method of computer data processing in MS Excel was used, which made it possible to automatically calculate the average score, the percentage for each of the questions according to the questionnaire's scale.

As a result of the interviews, students and teachers identified the following factors that contribute to realizing the participants' expectations in the educational process:

- efficiency of online platforms;
- convenience of online platforms;
- quality of online platforms;
- the safety of online platforms.

A questionnaire survey of teachers and students was conducted regarding their experiences, impressions, and analysis of learning outcomes during distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, students and teachers answered personal and online questions about the expectations and results of the implementation of the educational process online in connection with the transition of universities to the mode of distance education.

Research procedures have been designed to protect student privacy by allowing anonymous participation.

The information is relevant as this study was conducted between March and June and September to December 2020. This period is the time when universities were working in a remote format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From July to the end of August is the vacation for teachers and students in Russian universities.

The limitation of the study is its relevance, which can be recognized only for first-year students of the designated number of universities. Teaching foreign languages in the first year of study is a common component of the educational process at these Russian universities. At the same time, the main research questions were formulated in connection with the comprehension of the theoretical and methodological sources on this issue and the experience of teachers in organizing online learning. The research focuses on the issue of identifying practical tools for the development of forms and methods of teaching foreign languages. The limitation of the study leads to the fact that the authors did not ask questions about the gender or age of students and teachers who took part in the study, as well as psychological aspects of the comfort of learning, accumulated fatigue from online learning, and other important issues of online learning.



### 3. Results

The abrupt transition of most Russian universities to distance learning revealed both the presence of high-quality developments in disciplines and a vast number of problems in training. Many universities managed to develop courses for students' independent work, which were subsequently redesigned for the education needs. The question of whether students are improving learning efficiency by switching to online education is controversial [6,23]. However, the online approach requires teachers and students to possess at least a basic technical and general information and communication competence and have equipment with a camera and microphone. It also turned out that total immersion in an online environment considerably tires the participants and increases the level of psychological stress. Some of the teaching staff were not ready for this form of work for many reasons: age, lack of a stable and high-speed internet connection at home, lack of a "home" isolated office, and lack of skill in working with electronic materials. Also, it became necessary to compensate for face-to-face studies that require communicative interaction or oral answers and evaluate them somehow. For the implementation of face-to-face training, teachers used Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, and other interactive technologies, which allowed the educational process to be carried out remotely. At the same time, Zoom was at the peak of popularity thanks to its advanced settings and the presence of a built-in interactive whiteboard with commenting tools. The latest security and access settings update had improved classroom comfort and session manageability.

At this stage of introducing computer technologies and the internet in educational institutions' activities, the essential restructuring of the educational process for distance learning is associated with accumulating information and educational potential within each institution. However, further progress in distance learning development is hindered by insufficient financing of the education sector, mistrust of information technology, and insufficient participants with special training in creating and using information and communication technologies in the educational process. The level and efficiency of using these technologies in education also depend on such deep reasons as choosing the priority model of education and the principles on which this education is based. It is not easy to imagine classes devoted to the formation of communicative competence without multimedia tools [35–37]. For example, in the process of teaching foreign languages, the use of multimedia is essential. This circumstance brings communication closer to natural foreign language communication, regardless of what kind of communication is meant, oral or written [38].

New media technologies allow people to turn to the social and cultural life of society in other countries. The internet opens access to authentic discourses of various orientations. The internet also makes it possible to produce and transmit texts, i.e., providing interactive communication with speakers of other languages and cultures conveniently in their mode. Currently, multimedia has taken a firm place in the practice of teaching foreign languages. In addition, multimedia tools are used for simulating communication situations in which students of higher educational institutions may find themselves in their future professional activities [39].

Teaching foreign languages is very harmoniously implemented based on online communication tools. This statement is based on the practical implementation of distance learning at the level of higher and additional vocational education during the COVID-19 period in organizing the study of foreign languages at Volgograd State University (Volgograd), Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (Nizhny Novgorod), Tomsk Polytechnic University (Tomsk), Ural Federal University, named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin (Ekaterinburg). During the study, 928 first-year students and 76 foreign language teachers were interviewed. During the analysis, data were considered from March to June 2020 and from September to December 2020.

Changes in teaching technologies need to consider the students' point of view on online education. First-year students' perception of the quality of education is reflected in their perceptions of the following:

- have students achieved learning outcomes;
- are the students satisfied with the information received and support from the teacher;
- to what extent the technical competence of the learning process corresponded to the current state of online technologies;
- how involved are students in the learning process through their intellectual and emotional stimulation by the teacher;
- how comfortable is the learning process;
- whether students have achieved a sense of group and community in learning.

These student expectations are the perception of quality in online learning. The main factors that, according to students, contribute to the realization of their expectations are the effectiveness, quality, safety, and convenience of the educational process. Note that factors such as the effectiveness and quality of education are associated with learning. Comfort and safety are conditions that can contribute to the quality of teaching but are not directly responsible for this. The use of communication, educational platforms, and educational management platforms such as Zoom, Moodle, Discord, Jit.sy, Google, and other platforms were considered. The platform's choice depended on the capabilities of the educational institution in technical and economic terms, as well as on the teacher's personal preferences and the requirements for supporting the lesson and its tasks. Therefore, in this issue, only the opinion of English language teachers was taken into account. At Volgograd State University, English teachers used the platforms Moodle (44%), Zoom (31%), Teams (22%), and Jit.sy (3%). At Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (Nizhny Novgorod), Tomsk Polytechnic University (Tomsk), teachers used Moodle and Zoom to organize Zoom's educational process conduct online classes, and Moodle to submit and check written assignments. At Ural Federal University (Ekaterinburg), between March and June 2020, English teachers used Moodle and Zoom to organize the educational process. Teachers used Zoom to conduct online classes, Moodle to submit and check written assignments. In September 2020, Ural Federal University introduced the Teams platform, which required transferring online classes and submitting written assignments to Teams. However, Zoom turned out to be preferable for teachers. A total of 90% of English teachers used Zoom to teach online classes, and assignment platforms were Moodle (70%) and Teams (20%). However, 10% of English teachers only used Teams.

In addition to the didactic analysis of academic performance, a questionnaire survey of teachers and students was conducted regarding their experience, impressions, and analysis of results. Figure 1 shows the results of a survey of students and teachers at Volgograd State University (Volgograd), Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod (Nizhny Novgorod), Tomsk Polytechnic University (Tomsk), Ural Federal University, named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin (Ekaterinburg).

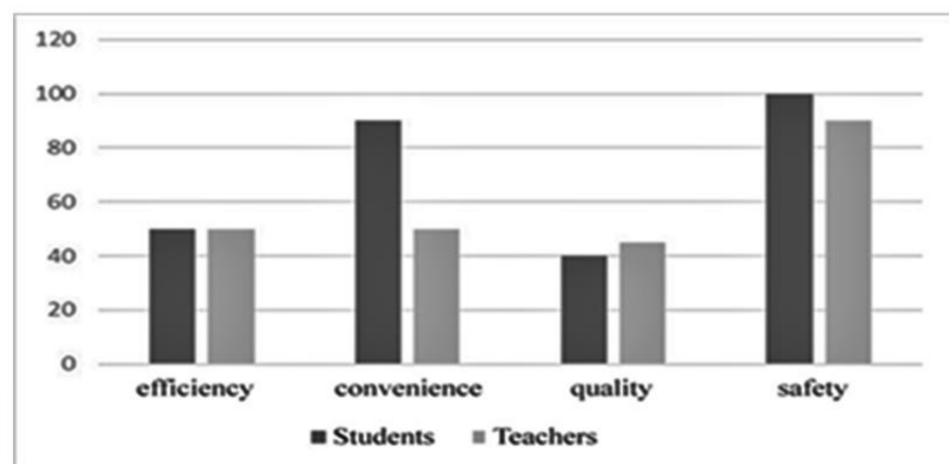


Figure 1. Usability of online platforms according to teachers and students.



The parameters assessed by students and teachers are as follows: efficiency, convenience, quality, and safety of online platforms. Figure 1 shows the results. The efficiency of using online platforms was noted by 50% of students and 50% of teachers. The convenience of online platforms in teaching a foreign language was noted by 90% of students and 50% of teachers. Altogether, 40% of students and 45% of teachers believe that teaching a foreign language using online platforms is a quality education. The safety of using online platforms for teaching a foreign language is important for 100% of students and 90% of teachers.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1. Factors of Application of Online Communication Technologies in Foreign Languages Teaching

Modern higher education aims to train highly qualified workers, which impacts the dynamics of technological progress in different countries. Therefore, the employment of online communication technologies in teaching is significant for achieving the goal of education. The key factors in the use of information and communication technologies in foreign language teaching are the following:

1. Possession of the basics of info-communication literacy, the ability to adapt in the face of a rapid technology change, and foreign language information flow are indispensable requirements of the modern labor market. An example of such skills is a person's ability to search for information using various sources, verify and analyze information and sources of information, present information, check the information's reliability, and other skills [40,41]. These skills can be applied in various aspects of human activity, from assessing websites' credibility to creating and sharing media content. Of course, today, these skills include the level of knowledge and skills of their practical application, the practice of cultural use of technical means (mobile gadgets and computers), and the digital environment's communication capabilities. Of course, today, these skills should be formed not only by students but also by teachers. Teachers need to know the modern language of communication in order to teach students. Otherwise, teachers' information and communication illiteracy will become barriers between generations and interfere with an effective educational process. Info-communication literacy includes digital, information, and scientific literacy. On this basis, info-communication literacy allows using technological opportunities to develop the ability to communicate with people in a new social format and be ethical and considerate towards other people.
2. The computer and the internet are helpful tools for developing new forms and methods of teaching foreign languages. The computer and the internet changed the educational paradigm adapted to developing the information society and meeting its needs. Using a computer in the learning process makes it possible the following:
  - to organize educational databases to provide course and diploma design;
  - complete a variety of educational tasks using digital technologies;
  - to carry out independent search and information work and student research;
  - automate laboratory practice;
  - to conduct lectures and seminars.

The computer and the internet allow a wide range of the population to develop and learn foreign languages. In addition, the computer and the internet allow socially active groups (youth, athletes, schoolchildren) and people with reduced mobility (pensioners, people with special educational needs) to enter the learning process.

3. The use of information and communication technologies in teaching is necessary for a person living in a global information society. The development of computer networks and the growth in mobile telecommunication devices influenced various social processes. They led to forming a highly organized information environment that determines the processes of social relations [36]. Online communication technologies make it possible to involve its participants in communication with native speakers of another language [38,42]. At a certain point, the process of acquiring personal

experience of students' communication with carriers of a foreign language culture leads to the creation of situations of practical use of the language as an instrument of intercultural cognition and interaction. Thus, the use of information technology in the educational process has advantages:

- teachers and students can carry out prompt feedback;
- teachers can visualize educational information;
- teachers and students are able to store sufficiently large amounts of information with the possibility of its transmission;
- teachers can automate the processes of information and methodological support, organizational management of educational activities, and control over the results of studying the discipline.

#### 4.2. Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Communication Tools

There is a saturation of technologies of remote communication in various countries, in Russia, in particular. This circumstance allows society to create conditions for intercultural communication online. As a result, such intercultural communication becomes an extremely urgent task and requires mastering language skills. Simultaneously, in current conditions, teaching interlanguage communication should include mixed forms of education, i.e., regular classroom work and distance education technologies. In such conditions, the internet and other interactive online technologies will undoubtedly become the basis. Interactive online technologies can be actively used in teaching a foreign language and foreign-language academic written communication, translating them into the category of teaching and education tools. The leading technologies currently available in online communication training can be divided into two groups: means of synchronous and asynchronous communication.

Synchronous communication tools are internet tools that allow communicating in real-time. Examples are Skype chat, Social Messenger, Discord, Viber, WhatsApp, and other internet tools. Chat platforms are used for pedagogical purposes, as they open new opportunities in teaching a foreign language. In the work of chat platforms, two main functions can be distinguished. The first function is developing academic writing skills. The second function is the development of conversational speech. Most of the above systems allow corresponding via chat and arrange individual video communication and video conferencing.

Skillful use of synchronous communication, both in video format and in chat format, can quickly improve students' and teachers' communication skills. The primary motivation is often the possibility of communication on topics of interest in the target language [43,44]. Internet networks provide students with a massive number of sites, videoconferences, chats on entirely different topics. As a result, motivation for acquiring new knowledge in the areas of interest complements learning a language. For example, it will often be attractive for young students to communicate in chats and forums and for specialists to discuss their professional problems in the framework of videoconferences. At the same time, the training functions here are different for different instruments of the same programs. Video conferencing, films, and TV form the skills of speech recognition and communication. Chatting and online communication programs help students improve their academic writing skills. Networking has many advantages over conventional face-to-face communication methods for the development of academic writing skills for students. In virtual network reality, communication is indirect since this communication is communication through text. Often, networked students' communication is devoid of paralinguistic means of communication. However, intonation, vocal timbre, loudness, and speed of speech have significant importance for people. Instead, students focus on communicating information through the means of writing. Chats allow implementing projects with other countries or discuss topics with a guest representative of another country competent in a particular area of scientific knowledge. At the end of the conversation, the function of archiving the text of the chat allows to analyze the chatlog in terms of grammar, vocabulary, punctuation,

stylistics, and on this basis to build a further development trajectory. Daphne Gonzales identifies five types of pedagogical chat:

- chat on a free topic; the main task is the general practice of writing in the target language;
- chat aimed at solving a specific educational problem, for example, writing a resume, official letter, essay;
- chat seminar or chat presentation, for example, a completed project;
- chat aimed at working out a specific thematic material or action, for example, chat interviews with the development of formulating information requests;
- evaluative chat aimed mainly at monitoring and assessed the degree of assimilation of one or another material [45].

The integration of chats, like some other means of online communication into the educational process, allows quite effectively solving many didactic tasks when teaching academic writing:

- to form and improve the skills of academic writing;
- to form and improve the skills of written dialogical interaction, interviewing;
- replenish vocabulary, both active and passive, with the vocabulary of a modern foreign language;
- to acquaint with the target language's socio-cultural realities (speech etiquette, features of speech behavior, features of culture, traditions of the country of the target language);
- to form students' stable motivation for foreign language activity.

Chat rooms and video forums are helpful learning tools, especially at the initial stage of learning a foreign language. In the course of primary education, additional motivation can significantly improve academic writing skills. However, when the learner reaches a comparable or equal level with communication, the incentive for further improvement is leveled. Why further improve students' writing skills if the goal of mutual understanding has been achieved? In this case, to deepen the skills, it is worth switching to other means of communicative training: business correspondence, professional literature, video and audio lectures, and special training applications.

One of the widespread forms of internet communication is the use of asynchronous communication tools. Asynchronous communication means including internet means exchanging information with a time delay (forums, email, websites, blogs). The most popular form of modern asynchronous communication is blogging, and the blogging profession has gained unprecedented popularity [46–48]. Thus, a teacher who creates a blog trains written communication skills and draws attention to an image. A blog is a page of a site presented in the form of a journal diary or calendar. The information is arranged in chronological order in a blog. A teacher can place text, photos, audio, video, links to other sites, and internet articles in the blog. Student blogging as part of the study of disciplines leads to in-depth learning and the development of comprehensive reflective thinking [49]. Anderson and Elloumi [50] show that weblogging is a learning style that encourages students to learn, express their opinions, criticize other positions, engage in team and individual projects, and freely share their research and reflection. Weblogs allow students to generate knowledge and express their opinions freely. This feature of blogs makes them useful in the educational process [50].

G. Stanley identifies three types of educational blogs used in teaching language subjects:

- tutor's blog, supported by the teacher independently;
- student blog, supported by the student individually;
- a collective or group blog, supported by joint efforts [46].

Teachers can use educational blogs to post required learning and complementary self-study materials for students. In many cases, educational blogs are collective. A blog is an open means of informing students about the current work within the discipline. The blog acts as a source of internal news, educational and additional materials, and feedback comments. Blogs provide an opportunity for feedback by commenting on blog posts. An

important goal of educational blogs is to provide and support the educational process, which includes the following tasks:

- discussion of what has been read (written expression of one's opinion);
- identification and discussion of controversial issues and topical problems (asynchronous dialogue);
- joint work of students on the project;
- control over the implementation of projects (joint or individual).

Students can use blogs to find original text, video, and audio information. Students can refer to news sites that offer a wide variety of information on various topics. Examples are CNN World News (<http://edition.cnn.com>, accessed on 20 June 2021), ABC News (<http://abcnews.go.com>, accessed on 20 June 2021), BBC World Service (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice>, accessed on 20 June 2021), The Washington Times (<http://www.washtimes.com>, accessed on 20 June 2021).

ABC News (<http://abcnews.go.com>, accessed on 20 June 2021) provides visual and audio support for its publications. Written communication among readers is expected on the proposed topic in the chat sections.

The New York Times (<http://nytimes.com>, accessed on 20 June 2021) has a generic link tree structure. The name and number of headings may vary from publisher to publisher. However, they all cover the main areas of human activity.

CNN World News (<http://edition.cnn.com>, accessed on 20 June 2021) provides information in multiple languages and dual categorization of articles. Students and teachers can call up audio and video accompaniment. Interaction of readers with the editorial board and among themselves is possible within the discussion heading framework. In addition, there is a message board, a chat room (Chat), and communication with the editorial board (Feedback).

BBC World Service (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice>, accessed on 20 June 2021) provides an opportunity to read and listen to the news in many languages. People can choose the appropriate English proficiency level and get acquainted with the news in Learning English mode (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish>, accessed on 20 June 2021). The dual classification of articles—by topic and by continent—might seem attractive.

One of the representative sites for teaching foreign languages is <http://www.spiegel.de> (accessed on 20 June 2021), which offers a wide range of opportunities for developing academic communication skills.

A teacher can invite students to work in groups to research articles covering all aspects of life: editorials, sports, culture. The next step is to analyze the mini-study and publish the mini-study results in the forum, followed by a study discussion. The advantage of such work is the full involvement of the entire class, combined with the differentiation of tasks. These tasks study cultural and social articles identifying specific patterns and features and the report on weather conditions or social events in one or more regions, depending on the participants' level of training.

This type of asynchronous facility is quite controversial. The reason is that many students occasionally ignore the didactic component and use blogging to express emotions. This trend is reflected in the quality of content and decreases the work's educational value. Also, students begin to demonstrate less motivation for learning with the strict use of only writing practice in blogs with a separation from offline communication and discussion of the results obtained on their material and classmates' products. The reason is that there is no live communication. On the other hand, the work on the analysis of materials and their translation contributes to the more in-depth acquisition of academic writing skills [51–53].

Monographs, newspapers, and other printed sources are presented in a more or less correct, grammatically verified language, enriched or even abundant in various stylistic devices. Such printed sources are complex for students to master independently and require a higher level of training. On the other hand, blogging is a process that does not necessarily require a high input level of competence that can be explicitly aimed at the formation of productive skills. Also, in their blog in the virtual space, students often feel freer.

#### 4.3. The Advantages of Integrating Online Communication Tools into the Educational Process of Teaching a Foreign Language

Integration and application of information and communication online resources in the learning process contribute to implementing the goals and objectives of training and education for sustainable development. The introduction of information and communication technologies in teaching foreign languages is essential in university education. In university education, the use of a foreign language comes to the fore to obtain information, expand vocabulary and knowledge. The teacher's position is changing. The teacher ceases to be the source of knowledge. Instead, the teacher is the organizer of student activities.

Modern education is focused on reducing time costs and improving the quality of education. The primary means of the information environment of any education system are a personal computer and the corresponding software. Thanks to the emergence of internet networks, instant access to world information resources are possible. Students can use electronic libraries, databases, and file storage. Information from electronic scientific libraries is necessary for the educational process in universities since access to current scientific information allows the training of qualified specialists. Other tools are available online to help teachers effectively organize the learning process, such as email, forum, chat, and other tools [54,55]. In addition, the internet allows audio and video conferencing and virtual training sessions in real-time.

However, the results of the empirical research presented in this article show that the ease of use of online platforms was rated lower by teachers than by students (Fig. 1). The arguments cited were the problem of connection, work stability, lack of interactivity with participants, difficulty controlling a small and large group of students, and the limited number of training places on some platforms. On the contrary, students appreciated the convenience of online learning platforms much more. It was partially attributed to the fact that there is no longer the need to get to the place of study and prepare to go to public places. However, less than half of the surveyed students and teachers believe that online learning is a quality teaching of a foreign language. This circumstance is partly due to teachers' inexperience in a complete transition to distance learning, the instability of the internet connection, the inability and unwillingness of students to lead a responsible and independent lifestyle.

The use of information and communication online technologies has advantages over traditional methods of teaching foreign languages. Information and communication online technologies allow solving significant didactic problems:

- to increase the level of independent work of students, the effectiveness of their self-training;
- to provide a process of continuous and flexible learning for the study and consolidation of the passed material;
- create various learning situations playfully;
- to ensure the required level of assimilation of educational material;
- to develop reading skills and abilities using authentic materials of varying degrees of complexity;
- to perceive foreign language speech by ear while listening to authentic sound texts presented on the global internet;
- develop the skills of controlling the material heard by performing a series of communication, oriented exercises prepared by the teacher;
- improve writing skills;
- replenish vocabulary with the vocabulary of a modern foreign language and other tasks.

Thus, the use of online technologies in the process of teaching foreign languages contributes to the development of the necessary skills and abilities in students:

- writing through email correspondence and blogs;
- reading by examining the content of text messages in email, blogs, websites;
- listening through listening and watching audio/video materials, listening to the interlocutor's speech during the video conference at the lesson;
- speaking through communication during the videoconference in the lesson.

The use of information and communication online technologies in education is due to the following main factors:

- the requirements of the modern labor market, which make it necessary for a university graduate to master the basics of information and communication literacy, the ability to adapt in the face of rapid changes in technology, and the flow of foreign language information;
- changes in the educational paradigm adapted to the development of the information society and the satisfaction of its needs, which leads to the search and development of new forms and methods of teaching foreign languages;
- the demands of human life in a global information society in which intercultural communication is widespread.

Information and communication technologies allow teachers to organize the learning process using various means. In the process of learning a foreign language, such means of asynchronous online communication are used, such as email, forums, social networks, blogs, and other means. In real-time, during classes in a remote format, synchronous online communication between teachers and students is carried out in video conferencing using platforms such as Zoom, Google, and chat. Thus, the use of information and communication technologies in education contributes to education sustainability.

Integration of online communication tools into the educational process has many advantages. Online communication tools in teaching a foreign language allow students to improve their written communication skills and speak, listen, and read. Online communication tools provide an unlimited audience for student work, which increases student motivation and responsibility for the work's content. Online communication tools introduce students to network resources that offer exciting and helpful information on the topics studied and helps the student solve the problems set by the teacher. Online communication allows students to discuss the topics studied and organize discussions in the target language. The use of info-communication technologies affects the following areas within the education system:

1. Optimize the existing material, technical, and social base through the more rational use of time and study space with appropriate training.
2. Increasing the efficiency of combining classroom educational and independent research forms of work.
3. Formation and development of the entire set of professionally necessary competencies and student personality in a single global socio-cultural space.
4. Timely maintenance of the relevance and novelty of training courses using info-communication technologies.

## 5. Conclusions

This article presents the result of an empirical study and analysis of factors of application of online communication technologies in foreign languages teaching, synchronous and asynchronous means used in online learning, and the advantages of integrating online communication tools into the educational process of teaching a foreign language.

Online communication tools are an effective tool for developing new forms and methods of teaching foreign languages. On the one hand, the use of online communication means meeting the modern paradigm of education, which meets the conditions for the development of the information society. On the other hand, in the context of a pandemic, two trends were identified in the education systems of different countries: a disruption of the educational process and a forced transition to distance learning.

Using the questionnaire, we were able to identify four factors that, according to the changes of students and teachers, affect their satisfaction with the educational process in a distance form during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- efficiency of online platforms;
- convenience of online platforms;
- quality of online platforms;



- the safety of online platforms.  
The results showed the following:
  - 50% of students and 50% of teachers noted efficiency as the factor affecting the satisfaction of using the online platform;
  - 90% of students and 50% of teachers noted that the convenience of online platforms in teaching a foreign language is the factor affecting the satisfaction of using the online platform;
  - 40% of students and 45% of teachers believe that teaching a foreign language using online platforms is a quality education;
  - the safety of using online platforms for teaching a foreign language is important for 100% of students and 90% of teachers.

The study showed that distance learning is preferable for students and teachers in the era of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason is that students can implement an individual learning pace, re-watch a video of a lecture, get acquainted with additional material on the subject, and other advantages of online communication. The use of online communication tools as a tool for teaching a foreign language helps to organize synchronous and asynchronous communication between students and teachers: (1) supports interpersonal communication among students in a group; (2) a tool to increase student motivation; (3) a tool for self-realization of students and teachers in the use of preferred components of online learning; and (4) asynchronous online communication tools allow students to complete assignments and review material at their convenience.

Teaching foreign languages requires regular communication between the student and the teacher, and successful interpersonal communication needs to use several communication tools. The structured interviews in our study yielded qualitative results showing students' motivation to share their ideas in chat rooms and blogs. The students wrote messages and expressed their opinions on the issues discussed, shared what was difficult for them in the studied material. Thus, we can assume that students realized the need for communication and mutual support, which in the period of distance learning is possible only when creating well-being in the online environment.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, E.M., N.M., A.S.; methodology, E.M., Z.N., I.S.; investigation, E.M., N.M., A.S., Z.N., I.S.; resources, E.M., N.M., A.S., Z.N., I.S.; data curation, E.M., N.M.; writing—original draft preparation, E.M., A.S.; writing—review and editing, E.M., N.M., A.S., Z.N., I.S.; project administration, E.M., N.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Acknowledgments:** This research was supported by TPU development program.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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