

Social Determinants of Communicative Competence in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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Article history Submitted: 19 May, 2026 Revised: 29 May, 18 June, 24 July, 2026 Accepted: 25 July, 2026	Abstract Global education systems increasingly emphasize communicative ability as a core graduate outcome. This study seeks to synthesize empirical evidence on the factors shaping communicative competence (CC) and identify critical research gaps. A systematic search of peer-reviewed journal articles was conducted using databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering the period from 2014 to 2025. Inclusion criteria were applied to select 27 studies that directly assessed CC or its subcomponents (e.g., linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic). Thematic analysis was used to categorize studies. The review reveals that a constellation of factors, including self-efficacy, motivation, peer collaboration, teacher-student interaction, and the integration of digital tools such as blended learning and AI-assisted instruction, influences CC. While interactive and student-centered pedagogies consistently yield positive effects on CC, the dominance of traditional grammar-translation methods persists. Additionally, few studies explicitly examine the intercultural and pragmatic aspects of communication or adopt longitudinal and multi-institutional research designs. This study contributes to the literature by synthesizing findings across diverse methodological approaches and highlighting underexplored dimensions of CC in higher education. It identifies five key research gaps, including limited theoretical integration, insufficient focus on moderators and mediators, and a lack of performance-based assessments. The paper offers directions for future research and pedagogical practice aimed at enhancing communicative capacity in increasingly globalized academic settings.
Keywords: <i>Communicative competence, higher education, Russia, systematic review, self-efficacy, peer learning, interactive pedagogy, blended learning, intercultural communication</i>	

1. Introduction

. In an era marked by globalization, international mobility, and technological advancement, communicative competence (CC) has become a critical academic and professional asset. Beyond the confines of linguistic accuracy, CC encompasses a holistic array of interrelated abilities, ranging from grammatical and discourse competence to sociolinguistic and strategic skills, which enable individuals to use language appropriately and effectively in diverse social contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). As communication increasingly transcends geographic and linguistic boundaries, the importance of equipping university graduates with the skills to function competently in multicultural, multilingual, and digital environments has gained prominence. Higher education institutions, particularly in non-English-speaking countries, are under mounting pressure to ensure that students develop not only subject-matter expertise but also the communicative capacity necessary to thrive in global academic and occupational settings (Volkova et al., 2021).

Despite this imperative, a growing body of evidence suggests that CC remains underdeveloped among students worldwide, particularly in Russia, where grammar-based teaching methods still prevail (Onishchuk et al., 2020; Shcherbakova & Ilina, 2019). Russian university students, especially non-linguistic ones, seldom use practical language, which disconnects their academic linguistic education from their real-world communication skills. Studies reveal that Russian schools prioritize rote learning, grammar exercises, and written proficiency above spoken fluency and interaction ability (Evyugina et al., 2020; Sergeeva, 2014). This pedagogical mismatch has serious consequences: many graduates, although studying English for years, lack the confidence and competence to have spontaneous, meaningful conversations in professional or academic contexts (Kaldarova et al., 2024).

This disconnect between classroom teaching and communication realities demands greater research into CC development elements. Despite curricular reforms and pedagogical innovations such as blended learning and flipped classrooms (Yaroslavova et al., 2020), there is limited knowledge about the social and psychological factors that affect students' communication skills. Increasingly, self-efficacy, peer learning, student-teacher interaction, and social impact facilitate communicative development. Social cognitive theory by Bandura (1986) and sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1978)

emphasize the role of social interaction, modelling, and contextual support in learning and development. Empirical studies in educational psychology support these constructs. For instance, self-efficacy shows a learner's confidence in their communicative skills. It affects drive, tenacity, and linguistic risk-taking (Sun & Wang, 2020). Sociocultural theory-based peer learning allows learners to co-create meaning and construct knowledge in their zone of proximal development (ZPD), providing unique chances for informal and collaborative language usage (Markowski et al., 2021). Student-teacher contact gives learners scaffolding to bridge the gap between their current and future skills and boosts motivation and emotional engagement (Lantolf et al., 2021). Finally, social influence such as feedback, encouragement, and watching others succeed, motivates language attitudes and behaviors, encouraging communicative engagement and risk-taking (Arxé et al., 2020).

Technology has increasingly been recognized as a transformative factor in language instruction, complementing traditional pedagogies with more interactive and personalized approaches. Digital tools such as language learning applications, virtual classrooms, learning management systems (LMS), virtual and augmented reality environments, and social media platforms provide learners with opportunities for frequent practice, diverse communicative tasks, and simulations of real-world conversational contexts (Shemshurenko et al., 2021; Guillén et al., 2020). These affordances make technology a valuable enabler of CC. Nonetheless, the literature presents mixed findings. On the one hand, overreliance on technology may reduce opportunities for authentic face-to-face interaction, which remains essential for developing deeper communicative and pragmatic skills (Fuentes Hernández & Flórez, 2020). On the other hand, studies suggest that when effectively integrated into pedagogical design, technology enhances learner engagement, motivation, and opportunities for social collaboration (Tyagi & Dhar, 2017). These contrasting perspectives underscore the need for further investigation into the role of technology from the perspective of prior literature.

This comprehensive literature review synthesizes and critically evaluates socioeconomic determinants of CC research. It examines how self-efficacy, peer learning, student-teacher interaction, and social impact affect CC development and how technology may regulate these interactions. The review seeks to identify theoretical and empirical gaps, assess existing findings' robustness and consistency, and suggest future research to improve language education policy, instructional design, and teacher preparation. This thorough and theory-informed review adds to the literature on language education reform in non-English-speaking contexts and emphasizes the need for a socially based, technologically assisted CC framework.

2. Literature review

CC has evolved during the past 50 years. Chomsky's (1972) concept of linguistic competence focused on an individual's innate capacity for grammatical accuracy. Hymes (1972) expanded the framework to include sociocultural norms and practical language use. This change led Canale and Swain (1980) to propose a multidimensional model of effective communication that includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Canale (1987) added discourse coherence and cultural appropriateness to the model, making it more applicable to real-world communication. Thus, CC has become a complete notion that encompasses language proficiency across linguistic, social, and cultural aspects. Despite this conceptual clarity, empirical investigations show a gap between theoretical expectations and communication performance, especially in non-English-speaking nations (Naser, 2025). This disparity is significant in Russian higher education. The literature criticizes Russian universities' grammar-translation techniques, which prioritize written competency and language form above interactive communication and pragmatic skill (Ilyashenko et al., 2019). Sergeeva (2014) highlighted that most Russian students, despite formal English education, lack professional or cross-cultural communication proficiency. The problem stems from antiquated instructional approaches and an educational system that prioritizes theoretical language proficiency above practical usage.

Growing evidence reveals that social and psychological variables impact CC development as much as curriculum or teaching. Self-efficacy is a key predictor. Based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), self-efficacy is a person's conviction in their ability to perform actions that yield results. High self-efficacy improves language acquisition. Learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to communicate, persevere, and use language learning practices (Wang & Sun, 2020). Anam and Stracke (2020) found that Indonesian students with stronger self-efficacy performed better in language proficiency. Peer learning, which involves collaborative learning, improves language development in addition to individual beliefs. Peer learning is based on Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), specifically the ZPD, which states that learners may improve with the help of more capable peers. Studies show that peer learning environments promote realistic discussion, lower anxiety, and improve language use, which contributes to CC (Markowski et al., 2021). Within universities, however, formal peer learning strategies are not consistently implemented, and classroom environments remain predominantly teacher-centered (Isakova, 2017). This underutilization represents a missed opportunity to harness the collaborative benefits that peer interaction offers in language acquisition.

The quality of interaction between students and teachers is essential for successful language acquisition. Interactions between teachers and students foster a supportive environment that enhances motivation, provides language scaffolding, and promotes meaningful dialogue (Lantolf et al., 2021). Fahrutdinova et al. (2014) and Hasanah and Ratmanida (2023) demonstrated that interactive instruction enhances critical thinking skills in students. Educators serve as "more knowledgeable others," offering corrective feedback, encouraging engagement, and exemplifying appropriate language use. Research indicates that interactions between teachers and students are predominantly one-sided and centered around lectures (Makayev et al., 2021; Mei, 2023). Consequently, altering interactional patterns may enhance communication.

A further social factor is social influence, defined as the impact of others' behaviors, attitudes, and expectations on an individual (Walker, 2007). Social influence encompasses modelling, social persuasion, and peer reinforcement, which impact linguistic behavior and learner motivation within the framework of SCT. Arxé et al. (2020) and Limna et al. (2022) demonstrated that enjoyable social contexts promote language practice. Study groups and language clubs provide students with opportunities for authentic language use, thereby enhancing their confidence. Technology is transforming language instruction in conjunction with these social factors. Digital platforms facilitate autonomous and interactive language practice for students (Alzhanova & Chaklikova, 2022; Guillén et al., 2020). These technologies enhance CC by providing immediate feedback, simulating real-world interactions, and facilitating asynchronous practice (Ji et al., 2023; Kristóf, 2020), as indicated by various studies. The moderating effect of technology on social predictors remains insufficiently explored. Tyagi and Dhar (2017) demonstrated that technology can augment the effects of peer interaction on learning; however, Shemshurenko et al. (2021) cautioned that excessive reliance on digital tools may restrict spontaneous, face-to-face communication.

The literature indicates that cultural capital is complex and embedded within social contexts. Despite advancements in identifying instructional practices that enhance CC, social and psychological factors continue to influence communicative growth. Limited sample sizes, studies conducted at a single institution, and designs specific to particular interventions constrain research findings. Therefore, this study aims to review the literature and synthesize the findings of previous studies to understand the predictors of CC and identify the gaps and directions for future work.

3. Research Methodology

This systematic literature review used a formal approach based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to fulfil its goals and provide a thorough and transparent synthesis of current research. PRISMA helps researchers duplicate studies by reviewing the literature (Page et al., 2021). Figure 1 depicts PRISMA article selection. This methodological approach ensures replicability, transparency, and comprehensiveness when identifying, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing relevant empirical studies on CC in higher education.

3.1 Search Strategy and Data Sources

The grey literature search included Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Structured keywords and Boolean operators covered the review's main ideas. The search criteria were ("communicative competency") OR ("linguistic proficiency") OR ("communication skills") AND ("higher education") OR ("university students") OR ("undergraduate learners"). The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2025 to ensure recency and relevance to the evolving educational and technological landscape.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection of studies followed clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure alignment with the objectives of the review. Studies were included if they: (1) focused on CC or language communication outcomes in higher education; (2) examined one or more social predictors such as self-efficacy, peer learning, student-teacher interaction, or social influence; and (3) were published in English and available in full text. Studies were excluded if they: (1) focused solely on primary or secondary education; (2) addressed language competence from a purely linguistic or theoretical perspective without empirical evidence; (3) lacked a focus on social predictors or technology; or (4) were not peer-reviewed.

3.3 Study Selection and Screening Process

The study selection process followed a four-phase PRISMA flow: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification phase, a total of 1,124 records were retrieved from the databases. After removing duplicates, 873 studies remained for screening. Titles and abstracts were then screened based on the inclusion criteria, resulting in 151 articles considered for full-text assessment. Following a rigorous evaluation for methodological relevance, sample appropriateness, and theoretical alignment, 27 studies were ultimately included in the final synthesis.

3.4 Data Extraction and Coding

A structured data extraction protocol was developed to ensure consistency and comparability across studies. Key information was extracted from each study, including author(s), publication year, country/region, research design, sample characteristics, variables examined (e.g., CC, self-efficacy, peer learning), theoretical frameworks employed, instruments used, and main findings. Studies were also coded for the presence of moderating variables such as technology usage. The extracted data were tabulated using Microsoft Excel. Part of the tabulation is shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the process of selecting the articles.

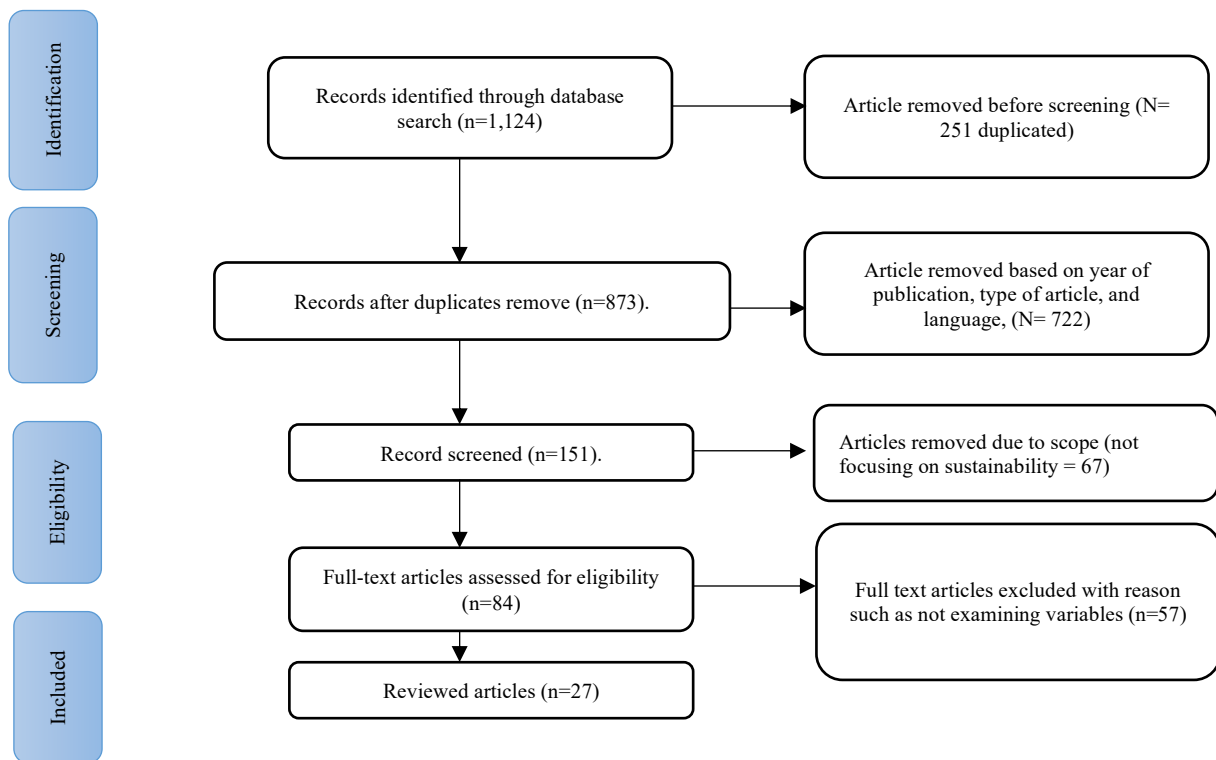


Figure 1: Process of Selecting Articles

Table 1 shows a summary of the studies that have been reviewed for the purpose of this study.

Table 1: Summary of Studies

Author-Year	Country	Sample Size	Type of Study	Objective of the Study	Findings
Fahrutdinova et al. (2014)	Russia	80 undergraduates	Quantitative	To examine how interactive methods foster CC in English language teaching.	Interactive instruction enhanced students' CC and critical thinking.
Sergeeva (2014)	Russia	54 students	Quantitative	To analyse CC under grammar-translation practices.	Found limited oral skills; grammar-translation hindered spontaneous communication.
Karlak and Velki (2015)	Croatia	240 language learners	Quantitative	To explore motivation and metacognitive strategies in relation to CC.	Intrinsic motivation and self-regulated strategies improved oral performance.
Galiullina et al. (2015)	Russia	Observational	Qualitative	To critique Russian didactic language teaching approaches.	Teacher-centered methods reduced interactive competence.
(Farooq, 2015)	Pakistan	373 respondents	Quantitative	To test communication skills development across contexts.	Reported stronger communicative outcomes when learners engaged actively.
(Rezida A Fahrutdinova et al., 2016)	Russia	219 students	Quantitative	To develop and test a model for CC formation.	Model confirmed; interactive tasks and peer interaction were effective.
(Isakova, 2017)	Russia	231 students	Quantitative	To review peer learning in CC development.	Found peer collaboration underutilized; need for more dialogic practices.
(Tareva & Tarev, 2018)	Russia	189 students	Quantitative	To assess foreign language teaching effectiveness.	Showed better results with learner-centered approaches.
(Shcherbakova & Ilina, 2019)	Russia	120 undergraduates	Quantitative	To evaluate interactive teaching groups.	Interactive groups outperformed control in fluency and confidence.
Ilyashenko et al. (2019)	Russia	100 students	Quantitative	To assess blended learning's effect on CC.	Blended learning improved CC compared to traditional methods.
(Yaroslavova et al., 2020)	Russia	70 students	Quantitative	To test blended learning approaches.	Hybrid models enhanced flexibility and oral communication practice.
Kristóf (2020)	Hungary	100 students	Quantitative	To explore online communication tools during COVID-19.	Video conferencing supported communicative engagement but lacked depth in pragmatic skills.
(Anam & Stracke, 2020)	Indonesia	180 undergraduates	Quantitative	To examine role of self-efficacy in communication outcomes.	Higher self-efficacy led to stronger communicative performance.

Guillén et al. (2020)	Spain	220 university students	Quantitative	To analyse digital/AI tools for communication practice.	Technology fostered collaboration and engagement; balance needed with face-to-face interaction.
(Evyugina et al., 2020)	Russia	73 survey participants	Quantitative	To evaluate interactive instruction on oral fluency.	Interactive methods improved fluency versus grammar-based approaches.
(Sandal et al., 2020)	Norway	Unspecified	Qualitative	To describe extracurricular opportunities for communication.	Highlighted lack of informal contexts for practice in Russia.
(Volkova et al., 2021)	Russia	60 students	Quantitative	To examine intercultural CC.	Interactive, culture-oriented tasks improved cross-cultural awareness.
(Markowski et al., 2021)	China	450 university students	Quantitative	To explore peer learning influence on CC.	Peer collaboration enhanced confidence and oral skills.
(Lantolf et al., 2021)	Russia	338 students	Quantitative	To apply sociocultural theory to CC.	Concept-based instruction and teacher scaffolding boosted competence.
(Tang et al., 2022)	Malaysia	130 students	Quantitative	To study dialogic learning contexts.	Peer-supported tasks significantly improved CC outcomes.
Limna et al. (2022)	Thailand	390 university students	Quantitative	To apply UTAUT in language learning via Netflix subtitles.	Social influence positively impacted motivation and communicative skills.
Alzhanova & Chaklikova (2022)	Russia	Case study	Qualitative	To explore digital platforms in language education.	Technology enhanced practice but required stronger pedagogical alignment.
Hasanah & Ratmanida (2023)	Indonesia	250 undergraduates	Quantitative	To analyse teacher-student interaction on motivation.	Interactive teaching raised engagement and communication outcomes.
Ji et al. (2023)	China	300 learners	Quantitative	To review conversational AI in teaching.	AI-based tools supported learning but required human scaffolding.
(Kaldarova et al., 2024)	Kazakhstan	365 students	Mixed-Method	To test blended and conceptual teaching approaches.	Mixed-method confirmed benefits of hybrid models and peer learning.
(Wei et al., 2025)	China	306 engineers		To examine mediation effects of social predictors on CC.	Found significant mediation effects; SEM validated model.
(Naser, 2025)	Iraq	300 university students	Quantitative	To test CC interventions.	Experimental design showed improvement in oral performance.

4. Results

This systematic literature review synthesized findings from 27 empirical studies examining the social determinants of CC among undergraduate students in higher education. The studies, spanning from 2014 to 2025, were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria and collectively present a comprehensive view of how individual, relational, and contextual factors contribute to the development of CC in academic environments. Figure 2 shows the distribution of articles based on the year of publication. It shows that the majority of articles were published between 2020 and 2021, and there was a decreasing trend in 2023 and 2024.

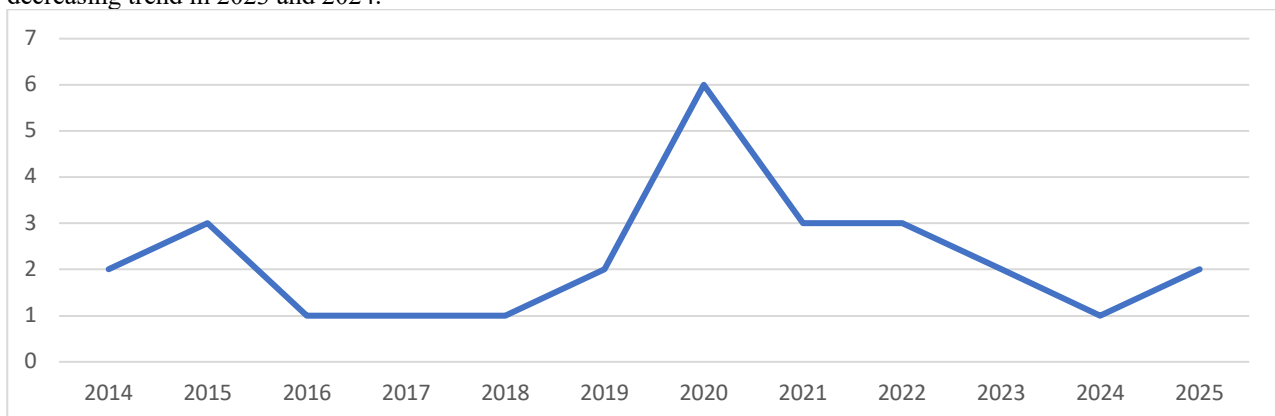


Figure 2: Distribution of Articles Based on Year of Publication

As shown in Figure 3, the reviewed studies were primarily concentrated in Russia (48%), with additional contributions from countries such as China (11%), Indonesia (7%), Spain (4%), Malaysia (4%), Hungary (4%), Norway (4%), Pakistan (3%), and Croatia (3%).

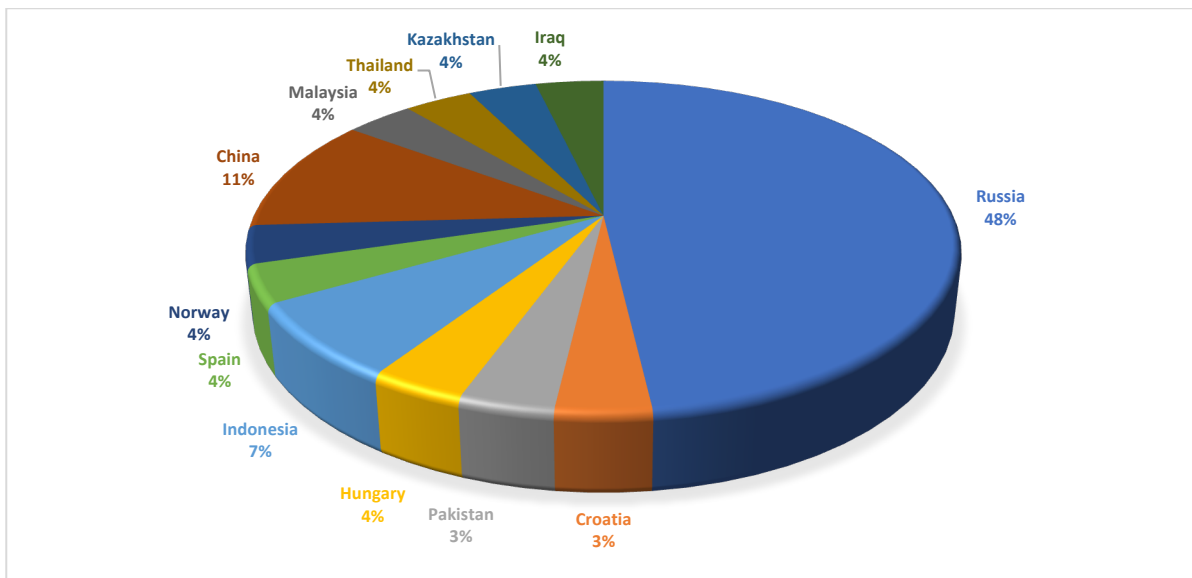


Figure 3: Distribution of Articles based on Countries

In terms of methodological design, Figure 4 shows that the majority of studies adopted a quantitative approach (82%), employing structured surveys, quasi-experimental designs, and statistical analyses to assess relationships among variables. Qualitative methods (11%) included interviews, content analysis, and classroom observations aimed at understanding student experiences and instructional dynamics. Mixed-method designs (7%) integrated survey data with qualitative insights to provide a more nuanced understanding of CC formation. A total of 61% of the quantitative studies have deployed first-generation data analysis, such as SPSS, while 39% used the second-generation structural equation modelling, such as AMOS and Smart PLS. The largest sample size among the quantitative studies is 450, while the minimum sample size is 54, with a mean of 217.2 respondents among the reviewed studies.

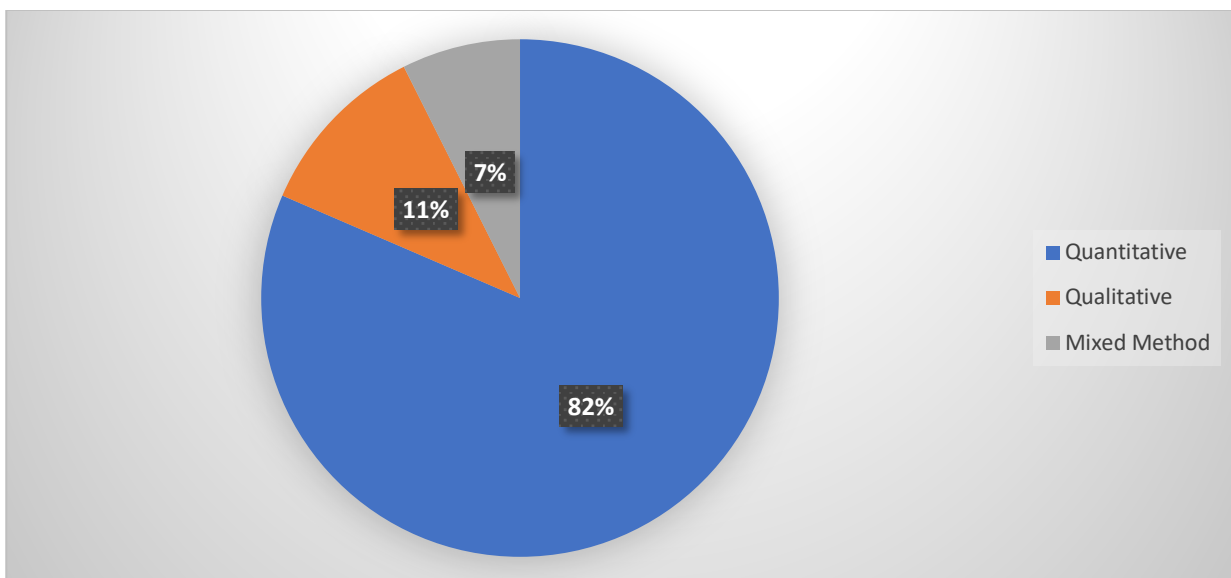


Figure 4: Distribution of Articles based on Approach

4.1. Individual-Level Psychological Predictors of Communicative Competence

The analysis revealed that individual-level psychological constructs, particularly self-efficacy and motivation, were the most commonly investigated predictors of CC. Self-efficacy was emphasized in several studies, e.g., (Hasanah & Ratmanida, 2023; Sun & Wang, 2020), which consistently showed that students' belief in their communicative abilities significantly influenced their willingness to participate in conversations, their performance in classroom interactions, and their persistence in overcoming linguistic challenges. These findings support social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) that self-perception of competence impacts behavioral engagement and accomplishment. Motivation and learning skills also helped CC develop personally. In oral communication tasks, Karlak and Velki (2015) showed that students with more intrinsic motivation and metacognitive methods, including planning, monitoring, and reflection, performed better. These findings show how internal motivation, and strategic actions affect communication performance.

4.2. Interpersonal and Pedagogical Factors

Social connection, especially peer learning and student-teacher involvement, was another emphasis. A large number of studies (Fahrutdinova et al., 2014; Hamad et al., 2021; Markowski et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2022) stressed the value of dialogic learning contexts where students may practice language usage jointly. Interactive teaching strategies improved communication ability more than traditional training in experimental investigations (Evyugina et al., 2020; Shcherbakova & Ilina, 2019). These educational methods stressed involvement, active listening, and reciprocal interaction, supporting sociocultural theories of learning that emphasize language proficiency's social construction (Rezida A Fahrutdinova et al., 2016). Numerous university studies (Galiullina et al., 2015; Sergeeva, 2014) criticized didactic, grammar-translation-oriented teaching approaches. While effective in structural language training, these methods inhibited spontaneous oral communication. In contrast, interactive, learner-centered environments improved fluency, confidence, and pragmatic language usage.

4.3. Technological and Contextual Determinants

The reviewed research also found that technology-enhanced learning affects CC outcomes. Thirteen papers discussed AI-based platforms, virtual classrooms, speech recognition technologies, and blended or flipped learning methods. Technology-enabled immersive language practice, quick feedback, and personalized learning paths. Blended learning was a response to digital modernization and a strategy to encourage communicative learning. However, instructor training and pedagogical alignment were required for digital tool advantages. Technology might become superficial or harmful without proper curricular integration. AI-powered platforms offered adaptive learning, but instructors without digital literacy could not scaffold learners' participation (Alzhanova & Chaklikova, 2022).

4.4. Context-Specific Insights

Higher education's pedagogical, institutional, and cultural features affect critical competency development differently. Russian universities contribute 48% of the examined content, providing a complete history of CC education. Conventional teaching approaches, digital transformation initiatives, and structural limits influence communicative-oriented learning in a multifaceted way. A Soviet-era educational method that emphasizes textual precision, grammatical structure, and translation skills above spontaneous verbal engagement has dominated language training in Russian institutions. According to Sergeeva (2014) and Shcherbakova and Ilina (2019), this educational legacy has promoted memorization and formal precision above pragmatic and functional language usage. Grammatical knowledge and reading comprehension may increase, but fluency, interactive speaking, and cross-cultural communication rarely do. Institutional emphasis on form above function has impeded student communication in educational settings. Galiullina et al. (2015) and Evyugina et al. (2020) found that classroom activities mostly involve planned talks, single sentence translation, or teacher-directed recitation, limiting creativity, debate, and spontaneous interaction. Students with excellent academic competence in a foreign language may struggle to apply it in real-world or professional settings.

Educational inventiveness is rising in response to these limits. Multiple studies show that interactive, learner-centered, and technology-integrated techniques work. Yaroslavova et al. (2020) studied a blended learning paradigm including online and face-to-face instruction. Hybrid methods increase flexibility, autonomy, and classroom time for communication. Shcherbakova and Ilina (2019) found that interactive teaching groups outperformed control groups in fluency, appropriateness, and confidence. Digital technology integration is a major educational reform priority. Digital platforms, speech recognition, and AI-driven feedback systems provide customized learning and immersive language environments (Alzhanova & Chaklikova, 2022; Kristof, 2020). Technology interventions are not always successful. Insufficient digital pedagogy training for instructors leads to poor implementation. Language education includes instructional scaffolding and communicative learning objectives, not just technology.

Academic culture encourages hierarchical teacher-student relationships, which may prevent students from speaking, asking questions, and negotiating meaning. According to Khalmuradova (2020), classroom sociocultural norms may hamper risk-taking and innovative communication. Academic programs are generally inflexible and centralized, limiting instructors' ability to adjust course content or use learner-centered communication. Also important are the few extracurricular communication options. Students lack informal language learning contexts, including clubs, foreign exchange programs, and community engagement initiatives (Sandal et al., 2020). This reduces the ecological validity of language acquisition and the practicality of classroom skills.

The examined evidence suggests transformation despite these limitations. Universities are assessing modular learning architectures, competency-based curricula, and task-based language teaching (TBLT) to meet global communicative norms. Khalmuradova (2020) claims modular, student-centered learning technology helps integrate CC components. Digital literacy programs and the internationalization of colleges boost their competitiveness.

5. Discussion

This thorough research study illuminates the complex nature of CC in higher education. The combination of 27 empirical investigations shows that psychological, educational, and technical elements influence CC complexly. CC includes self-

efficacy, learner autonomy, social interaction, instructional design, and contextual alignment with global communication demands. This holistic view of CC emphasizes its importance in language instruction and other educational objectives, including employment, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness. The research emphasizes individual-level psychological enhancers like self-efficacy and motivation. According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), students' communication confidence affects their conduct and academic performance. The review shows that self-efficacy predicts performance and influences instructional tactics and communication outcomes. For instance, students exposed to interactive or peer-supported learning environments often demonstrate heightened confidence, which in turn enhances their willingness to engage in dialogue and develop oral fluency. However, a deeper theoretical integration of self-efficacy with CC models remains limited in the reviewed literature, signaling a need for more nuanced, theory-driven investigations.

The discussion also highlights that social and relational dynamics, such as peer collaboration and student-teacher interaction, are instrumental in shaping CC. Studies emphasize that dialogic instruction, group-based learning, and peer feedback provide learners with authentic opportunities to use language for meaning-making. This supports sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which frames learning as a socially mediated process. In terms of contextual and technological factors, the adoption of digital tools, including AI-based platforms, flipped classrooms, and blended learning models, has shown promise in enhancing CC by offering flexibility, immediacy, and interactivity. These tools were found to improve learners' engagement, autonomy, and performance in both formative and summative assessments. Nevertheless, the review reveals a gap between the availability of technology and its pedagogical integration. In many Russian institutions, instructors lacked the training, institutional support, or digital literacy to fully exploit these tools' communicative potential. Furthermore, few studies provided comparative analyses of the effectiveness of traditional versus technology-enhanced instruction on specific dimensions of CC (e.g., sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic), suggesting an underdeveloped area for empirical inquiry.

The review also exposes persistent systemic barriers in the higher education context, where a traditional focus on grammar-translation methods and written language instruction continues to dominate. While several studies acknowledge the limitations of such approaches, institutional inertia, rigid curricula, and limited exposure to authentic communicative environments remain unresolved. This disconnect between pedagogical practice, and communicative goals may hinder students' ability to perform in globalized academic and professional settings. Additionally, the lack of extracurricular communicative opportunities, such as language clubs, debate forums, or international exchange programs, further limits students' real-life application of communicative skills.

5.1 Research Gaps and Direction for Future Work

Although the current body of literature offers valuable insights into the determinants of CC in higher education, several significant gaps remain. These gaps, if addressed, could substantially advance both theoretical understanding and pedagogical application in this domain. First and foremost, there is a noticeable lack of robust theoretical integration in many of the reviewed studies. While some works loosely reference concepts from self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1998) or sociocultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978), few offer a comprehensive theoretical model that fully integrates cognitive, social, and contextual dimensions of CC. Most studies are atheoretical or adopt frameworks in a fragmented manner, limiting their explanatory power and generalizability. As CC is inherently a multidimensional construct, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic components, future research should build on established integrative models such as the CC Framework (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Second, a significant empirical gap exists in the exploration of moderating and mediating variables that could explain the differential impact of instructional interventions on CC. While variables such as self-efficacy and peer interaction are commonly cited, few studies systematically test how individual learner characteristics (e.g., gender, language background, academic discipline), environmental factors (e.g., institutional support, classroom size), or psychological variables (e.g., anxiety, motivation, mindset) might mediate or moderate the outcomes. This limits the ability of educators and policymakers to design tailored interventions based on diverse learner profiles.

Third, the review highlights a narrow focus on general communicative skills, with limited attention given to the subcomponents of CC, particularly intercultural, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competencies. Given the increasing globalization of higher education and the growing importance of cross-cultural communication in academic and professional domains, this omission is critical. Very few studies examine how learners interpret and respond to culturally embedded cues, negotiate meaning in intercultural contexts, or adapt language use to situational appropriateness, all of which are essential for communicative success in global settings.

Fourth, there is an over-reliance on cross-sectional and single-institutional research designs, which limits the generalizability and longitudinal validity of findings. Most studies collect data from a single cohort at one point in time, often within a narrow disciplinary or institutional context. As a result, the long-term effectiveness of instructional interventions and the developmental trajectory of CC over time remain largely unexplored. Moreover, the lack of multi-institutional or cross-regional comparisons makes it difficult to identify structural or contextual best practices that could be scaled across the higher education system.

Fifth, there is a methodological limitation in the predominant use of self-report measures, such as questionnaires and Likert-scale evaluations. While these tools offer insights into student perceptions and attitudes, they often fail to capture

authentic communicative performance or provide a nuanced understanding of learner interaction dynamics. The absence of mixed methods approaches, combining quantitative metrics with qualitative techniques such as classroom observation, discourse analysis, or interviews, restricts the depth and richness of the findings. Finally, the teacher's role in shaping CC remains under-researched. While some studies mention the use of interactive methods or digital tools by educators, few investigate how teacher beliefs, training, pedagogical strategies, and digital readiness affect students' communicative outcomes. This is a notable omission, as the success of any instructional reform depends on teachers' capacity and willingness to implement it effectively.

To address the aforementioned gaps and to enrich the discourse on CC in higher education, particularly within the evolving Russian academic landscape, several avenues for future research are proposed. Firstly, future studies should aim to develop and empirically test comprehensive theoretical frameworks that holistically capture the interaction between individual learner characteristics, instructional methods, and contextual factors. Frameworks such as the Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) model, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), or Activity Theory could be integrated with CC models to better understand the dynamic interplay of variables in different learning environments. Secondly, there is a need for rigorous investigations into mediating and moderating mechanisms, such as the role of academic motivation, technological proficiency, or learner anxiety. Structural equation modelling (SEM) or multi-group analyses using tools like Smart PLS or AMOS can help unpack these complex relationships and inform the design of differentiated pedagogical strategies. This would be particularly valuable in multilingual or multicultural classrooms where learners bring heterogeneous experiences and expectations.

Thirdly, researchers should prioritize the inclusion of underexplored sub-dimensions of CC, such as intercultural communication, digital communication literacy, and pragmatic awareness. Given the increasing reliance on virtual classrooms and international collaborations, studies that assess students' ability to engage in culturally appropriate and digitally mediated communication are particularly timely. Research could explore, for instance, how students manage turn-taking, tone, and context-specific expressions in intercultural video conferencing or email exchanges. Fourth, future research would benefit from longitudinal and multi-site designs that track the development of CC over multiple semesters or across different institutional types. This would allow scholars to assess the durability of instructional interventions, the impact of evolving digital environments, and the scalability of best practices across urban and rural, elite and non-elite institutions. Fifth, adopting mixed-methods and performance-based assessments will enhance the validity and richness of future findings. Studies could triangulate survey data with classroom interaction recordings, portfolio assessments, or peer evaluations to gain a fuller picture of learners' communicative abilities. Such approaches would also support more nuanced analysis of how CC manifests in real-world interactions, rather than abstract self-reports. Lastly, there is a compelling need to investigate the role of educators in fostering CC. Future research should examine how teacher beliefs, pedagogical content knowledge, and institutional support mechanisms influence the adoption and success of communicative teaching approaches. In particular, studies should assess the effectiveness of teacher training programs aimed at enhancing communicative instruction, digital literacy, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

6. Conclusion

This systematic literature review critically examined 27 empirical studies that investigated the social, psychological, and pedagogical determinants of CC among undergraduate students in higher education. The findings reveal that CC is a multidimensional construct shaped by individual learner attributes (e.g., self-efficacy, motivation), interactive pedagogical approaches (e.g., peer learning, student-teacher interaction), and technological or contextual enablers (e.g., blended learning, extracurricular opportunities). The review underscores the pivotal role of learner engagement and social interaction in developing functional language skills, especially when supported by appropriate instructional strategies and institutional environments. However, several research gaps persist, including the under exploitation of intercultural and pragmatic competencies, the limited application of theoretical models, and the scarcity of longitudinal and mixed-method studies. Furthermore, the impact of educators' competencies and institutional readiness remains an underexamined area warranting future attention. To advance the field, future research should prioritize the integration of comprehensive theoretical frameworks, adopt more diverse methodological designs, and consider broader cultural and institutional variables that influence communicative development. For educators and policymakers, the findings highlight the importance of adopting learner-centered and technologically supported pedagogies that foster active communication, critical thinking, and global readiness. Overall, CC in higher education is not merely a linguistic outcome but a holistic developmental process that intersects with broader educational goals such as inclusion, employability, and intercultural understanding. As higher education systems globally strive to align with international benchmarks and digital transformation, fostering CC should be at the heart of curricular innovation and pedagogical reform.

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