



FROM DIGITAL LITERACY TO PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE - A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract:

This paper presents the key elements related to the importance of digitalization in education, digital literacy, and teachers' digital competences. The rapid development of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed all aspects of modern society, including education. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is one segment of the educational system in which the application of digital technologies offers exceptionally wide opportunities for various forms of enhancement. Teachers' digital literacy and the development of their digital competences represent one of the fundamental prerequisites for the successful delivery of EFL instruction. Special emphasis is placed on the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators, which provides a set of guidelines that support the development of teachers' digital competences and enable them to effectively implement contemporary methods in EFL teaching. The research methodology employed in this paper is based on the analysis of secondary sources addressing topics related to the application of digital technologies in EFL instruction, as well as the development of teachers' digital competences. The study contributes to a better understanding of the significance of integrating digital technologies and developing teachers' digital competences within contemporary approaches to EFL teaching.

Keywords:

Digital Literacy, Digital Competences, Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators, Digitalization.

INTRODUCTION

The digitalization of education has fundamentally transformed the ways in which knowledge is acquired, transmitted, and applied. The use of digital technologies provides access to a vast amount of information, interactive content, and various types of digital tools and platforms, thereby increasing the flexibility and efficiency of teaching, while simultaneously enabling its adaptation to the needs and abilities of each individual learner. The application of different digital technologies has enabled significant improvements in all segments of the teaching process and the elimination of numerous shortcomings characteristic of traditional instruction.

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One of the most significant advantages of the digitalization of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is the personalization of instruction, which allows the pace of learning to be adapted to each individual learner. The use of digital tools greatly facilitates lesson preparation, enables the creation of materials that are engaging for learners, and supports the monitoring of students' performance. Another important advantage is the development of collaborative learning, which significantly enhances students' ability to communicate and work in teams. In addition to its numerous benefits, the digitalization of teaching also brings certain challenges, among which the most significant are the digital divide, the need for the development of teachers' digital competences, and data security.

In contemporary education, digital competences represent an essential component of the knowledge that EFL teachers must possess. The development of digital technologies and students' exposure to digital content place an imperative on teachers to integrate various digital tools into their teaching. EFL teachers use a wide range of digital tools to enhance students' language skills and to create models of real-life environments in which learners acquire different elements of the language. By utilizing digital competences, teachers can adapt instruction to different levels of students' knowledge and their learning styles. Digital competences enable EFL teachers to improve the quality of instruction and to provide learners with knowledge that has a high level of applicability in real-life language learning situations.

2. DIGITAL LITERACY AND DIGITAL COMPETENCES

Digital literacy and digital competences are essential elements without which it is not possible to ensure the effective implementation of teaching in contemporary conditions characterized by the digitalization of all segments of society. The concepts of digital literacy and digital competences have gained increasing importance over the past quarter of a century. The application of these concepts in education is intended to highlight the knowledge and skills that teachers should possess, as well as the knowledge they must transmit to students [1].

The concepts of digital literacy and digital competences are often mistakenly used as synonyms, despite the significant differences between them [2]. The term digital literacy was first defined by Gilster as "the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats

from a variety of sources when it is presented via computers" [3]. This definition was further developed by Joosten and colleagues, who emphasized that digital literacy, that is, the ability to use digital media, will become one of the fundamental and most important elements across all segments of modern society [4].

In academic literature and practice, digital literacy is often referred to as media literacy or computer literacy. "Digital literacy is based on the understanding of a skills-based concept and refers to the functional use of technology and the adaptation of skills" [5]. Contemporary approaches to digital literacy place increasing emphasis on individuals and their cognitive abilities, defining it as "the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats, with an emphasis on critical thinking rather than merely on the use of information and communication technologies" [6].

Digital competences are defined as "teachers' expertise in the use of information and communication technologies in a professional context, combined with sound pedagogical and didactic judgment and teachers' awareness of the impact that the use of these technologies has on learning strategies and work with students" [7]. The possession of adequate digital competences is one of the fundamental prerequisites for the effective and high-quality work of EFL teachers. Digital competences reflect teachers' ability to apply digital technologies in an efficient and flexible manner in their professional practice. These competences also include teachers' abilities to analyze, select, and critically evaluate data and information, to use digital technologies for presenting and solving problems, and to create shared and collaborative knowledge, while maintaining awareness of their personal responsibilities and respecting their own obligations and the rights of others [8]. From the perspective of EFL teaching, digital competences can be defined as a set of values, beliefs, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that enable the appropriate use of digital technologies for searching, accessing, organizing, and using information in order to create knowledge necessary for teaching [9].

Digital literacy is a narrower concept than digital competences. While digital literacy focuses on the use of various digital technologies, digital competences encompass additional elements related to teachers' ability to apply these technologies in an effective and flexible manner in their work. The aim of digital competences is to provide teachers with the skills needed to work with information from digital sources, with an emphasis on the context of their future activities and opportunities for continuous professional development [10]. Special



emphasis within digital competences is placed on teachers' ability to approach information critically and systematically. In contemporary approaches to teaching, digital competences are closely linked to teachers' professional expertise and represent one of the fundamental elements underlying their professional development.

3. THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE DIGITAL COMPETENCE OF EDUCATORS

The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) represents a response to the growing attention that a large number of European Union member states are paying to the need to develop a set of digital competences specifically tailored to the work of teachers [11]. The main objective of the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators is to enable the optimal use of the potential that digital technologies have in teaching. The framework aims to ensure that digital technologies are used in a way that enhances teaching and introduces various types of innovation into the educational process.

The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators has produced numerous positive effects, among which the most significant is the establishment of a basis for guiding policies for the development of teachers' digital competences at all levels [11]. The framework has also enabled the creation of a model that allows local stakeholders to quickly and efficiently develop concrete instruments aligned with their specific needs, eliminating the need to design their conceptual foundations from scratch. It supports the creation of

standards and the international exchange of best practices in the development of teachers' digital competences. One of the key advantages of the framework is that it provides a reference model for EU member states, as well as other countries and stakeholders, enabling the assessment of existing and future tools and frameworks aimed at developing teachers' digital competences.

The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators consists of 22 digital competences grouped into six areas, as shown in Figure 1 [12]. The first area is professional engagement and includes elements related to the use of digital technologies for communication, collaboration, and professional development. Digital resources represent the second area, which includes competences related to identifying, creating, and sharing digital resources. The third area is teaching and learning, which covers the management and orchestration of the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning processes. The fourth area is assessment, whose aim is to use digital technologies and strategies to improve assessment processes. Empowering learners is the fifth area and focuses on the use of digital technologies to enhance inclusion, personalize teaching, and actively engage students. The final, sixth area includes competences related to facilitating students' digital competence development, with the aim of enabling learners to use digital technologies creatively and responsibly for information retrieval, communication, content creation, and problem-solving.

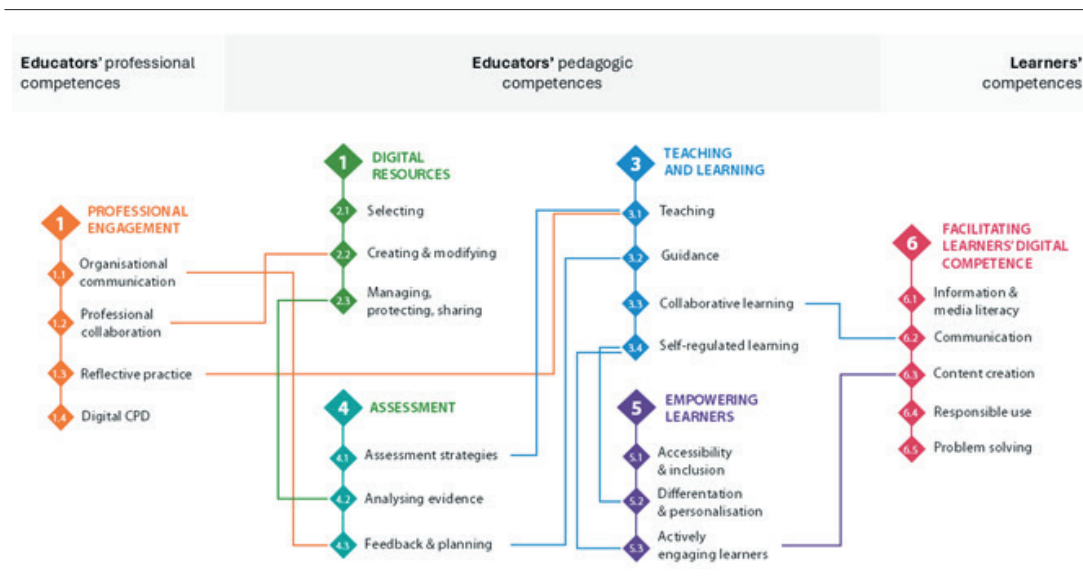


Figure 1. Adapted from: The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators [11]



The application of the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators has significant implications for foreign language teachers' work. These implications primarily stem from the fact that the framework defines the key skills and knowledge teachers need in order to effectively integrate digital technologies into the teaching process. In addition to providing guidelines for teachers' professional development, the framework also supports reflective practice and continuous improvement of teachers' digital competences [11].

The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators significantly enhances activities related to lesson planning. It encourages teachers to use digital tools to create various materials aimed at developing students' language skills [12]. The framework also highlights the importance of using digital technologies in assessing and monitoring students' progress [13]. In addition to student assessment, digital tools enable teachers to provide timely and constructive feedback, thereby significantly increasing both the transparency and efficiency of teaching activities.

A key implication of the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators is its support for adapting learning content to students with different levels of knowledge and needs, which significantly increases teaching effectiveness. The ability to adapt instruction for students with special needs also contributes to greater inclusion. Particular attention is given to the role of teachers as facilitators of digital literacy. In addition to teaching English language content, teachers are also expected to develop students' awareness of responsible use of digital technologies and critical thinking [14]. In this way, teachers help students prepare for successful communication outside the classroom and for safe use of digital technologies in their everyday lives.

4. SPECIFIC FEATURES OF DIGITAL COMPETENCES FOR EFL TEACHERS

The specific nature of the role of EFL teachers, compared to teachers of other subjects, is reflected in the need to create an optimal balance between three roles they perform. During their work with students, EFL teachers act as linguists, educators, and digital mediators [12]. Contemporary education is undergoing continuous changes driven by a range of factors, among which the most significant are the development of digital technologies, globalization, and structural changes in the labour market. These changes have also led to a transformation in the role of teachers.

The traditional perception of teachers as the primary source of information is increasingly insufficient for the effective implementation of the teaching process. Alongside the development of digital technologies, significant changes in the role of teachers have taken place over the past two decades [14]. Modern EFL teachers increasingly move beyond the boundaries of the classroom and become learning facilitators, mentors, strategic organizers of the educational process, and key actors in the development of students' language competences. The development of teachers' digital competences is one of the most important priorities in their work. Digital competences are no longer just one set of skills and knowledge that teachers possess; they have become a fundamental prerequisite for creating an environment in which students are motivated to learn and acquire language skills.

Teachers' digital competences in EFL contexts represent a highly complex set of knowledge, skills, and ethical attitudes. The use of digital technologies alone is not sufficient for achieving successful improvements in EFL teaching. Teachers must also possess pedagogical knowledge that enables them to create digital content that fosters collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking among students.

Workload is a major source of teacher stress, while challenging student behaviour can enhance teachers' intrinsic motivation. No significant relationship was found between teachers' and students' motivation, although teachers' extrinsic motivation was linked to students' academic achievement. These results highlight the need for improving teaching practices, increasing student motivation, and reducing teacher stress. [15]. Supportive classroom environments, the use of appropriate digital tools, and diverse teaching methods significantly enhance the language learning process. It also highlights that student motivation largely depends on teacher motivation, as well as on creating engaging lessons with an appropriate level of challenge. [16]

The contemporary environment places an imperative on EFL teachers to engage in lifelong learning and continuous professional development [1]. The rapid development of digital tools and new pedagogical methods based on them requires teachers to constantly acquire new knowledge and demonstrate a high level of intellectual flexibility. By adopting the paradigm of lifelong learning, teachers must transform their role in the teaching process, becoming facilitators who help students acquire new knowledge and develop their abilities.



In contemporary EFL teaching, a variety of approaches are used, among which task-based learning, communicative language teaching, and content-based instruction are the most common. Task-based learning uses authentic materials and tasks designed to simulate real-life conversations. This approach allows students to select and prioritize tasks according to their own needs and interests, thereby creating a sense of ownership over the learning process and increasing intrinsic motivation [17]. Communicative language teaching is based on the idea that language is most effectively learned when students actively use it in real communication situations. One of its core principles is the emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy, which makes it particularly suitable for use in digital tools [18]. Content-based instruction relies on learning a language through subject-matter content related to specific topics. This approach advocates language acquisition through exposure to authentic texts and tasks that reflect real-life situations students encounter.

5. DISCUSSION

Teachers' digital competences are one of the factors that will most strongly influence the quality of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the future. These competences are shaped by a combination of multiple individual and contextual factors that must be taken into account when designing plans and strategies for their development. The ongoing development of digital technologies is increasingly transforming the ways in which EFL instruction is delivered. Teachers' digital competences are becoming an essential element without which it is not possible to ensure effective teaching and the achievement of desired learning outcomes.

Digitalization and the development of digital competences are significantly changing the role of teachers in EFL instruction. The role of teachers in contemporary education systems is becoming increasingly complex and far more significant compared to traditional teaching models. Teachers are no longer passive transmitters of knowledge; instead, they are becoming facilitators, mentors, and innovators. Their primary task is to prepare students to adapt to a new environment in which digital technologies play a central role. The transformation process that EFL teachers are undergoing requires the development of their digital competences and pedagogical knowledge, enabling them to use digital technologies as a means of enhancing teaching practice.

6. CONCLUSION

The development of teachers' digital competences is one of the fundamental and most important prerequisites for the effective use of digital technologies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The importance of applying digital technologies is undeniable, as they enable the modernization of the education system and prepare students for life and work in a digital society. Investment in the improvement of teachers' digital competences enables the development of the knowledge and skills necessary for the successful transmission of language knowledge and for equipping students to adapt in the best possible way to their environment.

Mastering digital competences is one of the essential prerequisites for the successful work of EFL teachers in contemporary educational systems. The improvement of teachers' competences can be achieved through training programs and professional development activities organized at the level of states or educational institutions in which they are employed. These programs must ensure continuous professional development, the acquisition of digital competences, and the encouragement of reflective practice. Without institutional support, it is not possible to ensure adequate development of EFL teachers' digital competences, and this support must be based on the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators. Possessing digital competences has become an essential element of successful EFL teaching, without which it is not possible to meet the demands of contemporary education.

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