

Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Professional Digital Competence

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Abstract: The article explores the concept of professional digital competence among pre-service English language teachers. In the context of global digital transformation and the integration of technology in education, the ability of future teachers to effectively use digital tools has become a core component of professional readiness. The paper discusses theoretical foundations, models of digital competence, and practical approaches to developing these skills during teacher training. The results emphasize that digital competence is not limited to technical literacy but also includes pedagogical, communicative, and ethical dimensions of teaching in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital competence, pre-service teachers, ICT in education, teacher training, English language teaching, pedagogical technology.

Introduction: In the XXI century, the integration of digital technologies in education has become a global priority. The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has fundamentally changed the way teachers teach and learners learn. For English language teaching (ELT), digital tools offer new opportunities for collaboration, motivation, and authentic communication.

Pre-service English language teachers – those who are still in the process of professional training – must be equipped with not only linguistic and pedagogical knowledge but also the digital competence required to function effectively in modern classrooms. This competence determines their ability to design interactive lessons, use online resources, manage digital platforms, and maintain professional ethics in virtual environments. The purpose of this article is to analyze the nature of professional digital competence (PDC) among pre-service English language teachers and to propose strategies for its systematic development within teacher education programs.

The concept of digital competence has evolved from the early idea of “computer literacy” to a complex, multidimensional construct that integrates technological, cognitive, and social skills. According to the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu), professional digital

competence refers to the teacher's ability to use digital technologies confidently, critically, and creatively to enhance teaching, learning, and professional development.

Key dimensions of teacher digital competence include:

1. Information and data literacy – the ability to search, evaluate, and manage digital information effectively.
2. Communication and collaboration – using digital tools to interact, share, and engage in online communities.
3. Digital content creation – producing and editing digital materials such as videos, quizzes, and multimedia lessons.
4. Safety and responsibility – ensuring data protection, digital well-being, and ethical online behavior.
5. Problem-solving and innovation – adapting to new technologies and using them creatively in pedagogy.

In the field of English language education, digital competence also includes skills in using language learning applications, online dictionaries, interactive platforms like Quizlet, Kahoot, Padlet, or Google Classroom, and implementing blended or online learning strategies.

Professional digital competence in pre-service teacher training has a dual role:

- It is a pedagogical tool, enabling future teachers to

design learner-centered, technology-supported lessons.

- It is a professional requirement, ensuring that they remain competent in the digital society and can engage with innovations in ELT.

Teacher training institutions play a crucial role in shaping these competencies through:

- integrating ICT-based courses into the curriculum;
- providing practice with digital teaching tools;
- encouraging reflective use of online learning platforms;
- developing awareness of ethical and intercultural aspects of digital communication.

According to scholars such as Koehler and Mishra, the TPACK model (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) provides a useful framework for developing teachers' digital competence. It emphasizes the intersection of three knowledge domains:

- ✓ Technological knowledge (knowing how to use tools and platforms)
- ✓ Pedagogical knowledge (knowing how to teach)
- ✓ Content knowledge (knowing what to teach — in this case, English language).

Effective teacher training should develop the ability to combine all three dimensions in real teaching situations.

Despite the increasing availability of technology, pre-service teachers face several challenges in developing full digital competence:

1. Limited access to digital tools — some institutions lack modern technological infrastructure.
2. Insufficient practical training — digital skills are often taught theoretically without hands-on practice.
3. Psychological barriers — fear of technology or lack of

confidence in using digital tools.

4. Rapid technological change — tools and platforms evolve faster than training programs can adapt.
5. Ethical and cultural issues — teachers must learn to manage online behavior, copyright, and data privacy responsibly.

Addressing these issues requires systematic institutional support, continuous professional development, and the creation of digital ecosystems that encourage experimentation and innovation.

To build robust digital competence among pre-service English teachers, universities and training centers should implement the following strategies:

- Curriculum Integration: Include compulsory ICT and digital pedagogy modules focused on ELT applications, such as digital storytelling, online assessment, and virtual collaboration.
- Practical Workshops and Microteaching: Provide opportunities for students to plan and conduct lessons using digital platforms, receive feedback, and reflect on their experience.
- Blended Learning Environment: Combine online and face-to-face instruction to help students experience both sides of digital learning — as learners and as future teachers.
- Digital Portfolios: Encourage pre-service teachers to create e-portfolios that document their digital projects, teaching materials, and reflections.
- Peer Collaboration and Mentorship: Establish mentoring systems where experienced digital educators support pre-service teachers in mastering new technologies.
- Research and Innovation Projects: Involve students in small-scale research on digital tools in ELT — for example, the effectiveness of AI-based language learning applications.

Table-1. Model for Developing Pre-Service English Teachers' Digital Competence

| STAGE | OBJECTIVES | ACTIVITIES / TOOLS | EXPECTED OUTCOMES |
|--|--|--|---|
| Stage 1: Awareness & Motivation | Introduce the concept of digital competence and its relevance to ELT | Lectures, discussions, <i>DigCompEdu</i> framework overview | Understanding of digital competence as part of teacher identity |
| Stage 2: Technical Skill Training | Build practical skills in ICT tools for English teaching | Workshops using <i>Google Classroom</i> , <i>Zoom</i> , <i>Padlet</i> , <i>Canva</i> , <i>Kahoot</i> | Ability to use digital tools in lesson planning and delivery |

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|---|---|--|--|
| Stage 3: Pedagogical Integration | Apply digital tools in lesson design and classroom management | Microteaching with ICT, peer feedback, blended learning models | Creation of interactive, student-centered digital lessons |
| Stage 4: Reflection and Assessment | Encourage reflection and continuous improvement | E-portfolio development, reflective journals, digital feedback forms | Improved self-assessment and readiness for digital teaching |
| Stage 5: Practicum & Professional Engagement | Connect theory with real-life teaching practice | Teaching practicum using digital platforms, mentorship | Demonstrated professional digital competence in authentic contexts |

This table-1 contains a questionnaire developed to assess the level of professional digital competence among pre-service English language teachers.

CONCLUSION

Professional digital competence has become a cornerstone of teacher education in the XXI century. For pre-service English language teachers, it is a dynamic combination of technological skills, pedagogical knowledge, and critical digital awareness. Developing these competencies ensures not only their personal success but also the quality and innovation of English language education in a globalized digital world.

Teacher education institutions must, therefore, move beyond basic ICT literacy and foster a reflective, creative, and ethical approach to digital teaching. Only then can future English teachers become active agents of digital transformation in education.

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