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Chapter 4

Developing Digital Collaboration Skills of Elementary School Pre-Service Teachers of English Using Bloom's Taxonomy

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ABSTRACT

Lockdown due to COVID-19 has rapidly increased the level of digitalization of higher education. The chapter dwells on the way how the TPACK framework enhanced by the development of digital skills and Bloom's taxonomy influence pre-service elementary school teacher's academic success rate, as well as their perceptions of preparedness to implement digital collaboration instructional strategies in teaching elementary school students. The study was set at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University (Ukraine) in 2020-2022 academic years. Pre-service elementary school students (n=64), enrolled in two courses participated in the study. The study is mixed-method sequential explanatory design. The quantitative analysis of grades was followed by qualitative analysis of students' self-assessment and feedback. The data shows an increase in the student success rate and their interest towards implementing the digital technologies in their own practice. Further work needs to be done to disseminate an effective complex of activities for developing pre-service teachers' collaboration skills using specific digital tools.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2020 Ukrainian higher education has undergone major changes due to the COVID-19. There was a growing interest and societal expectations from pre-service teachers, employers, and other stakeholders towards the digitalization of Education. Universities have introduced mandatory online education during the lockdown. This has significantly facilitated the digital development of universities, stipulated further

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7015-2.ch004

Developing Digital Collaboration Skills

interest in developing online courses (Chan, Bista, & Allen, 2021), instructional design (Smith, Traxler, & Elgar, 2022) and professional development of instructors to acquire the necessary skills for teaching online. For two consecutive years Ukrainian educational institutions have been constantly moving on the continuum between synchronous, asynchronous and hybrid learning modes depending on the health advisories in the region and the situation in academic groups.

Best practices of implementing online learning at higher educational institutions across Ukraine were further re-actualized and implemented with the introduction of the Martial Law due to the Russian invasion into Ukraine in 2022. The Martial law was introduced on February 24, 2022, and entrusted local authorities with creating safe conditions for civilians (Order of the President of Ukraine No 64/2022 On the Introduction of the Martial Law, 2022). As a response to its introduction, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has recommended all educational institutions to stop the educational process and introduce the spring break (Ministry of Education and Science, 2022). It was resumed mid-March amidst the wartime when large territories of Ukraine were still occupied (In most oblasts of Ukraine the educational process resumed – Minister Shkarlet, 2022). It was possible due to the implementation of the experience of organizing the distance learning during lockdowns. Educational institutions unrolled distance learning full-scale across the country in less than three weeks from the full-scale invasion.

However, Kavytska and Drobotun claim that back in March 2020 the overall preparedness of instructors and instructional design support was inconsistent (2022), due to the lack of institutional guidance, technical support, and low digital literacy of participants of the educational process. As Kim concludes, one of the major drawbacks of training students online was their fatigue and lack of real authentic reasons for discussion and communication online due to reasons related to lack of familiarity with online learning and feeling “as if they talk to the screen” (Kim, 2021). It is important to add, that in 2022 the situation is contrary to the one in 2020 and it is necessary to disseminate best practices meanwhile accumulated by educational institutions.

Scholarly research has consistently shown that one of the major drawbacks of online learning is students’ fatigue, distress, lack of communication with peers (Balta-Salvador, et al., 2021; Kim, 2021; Mosleh, et al., 2022; Salim, et al., 2022; Shanahan, et al., 2022; Yeh & Tsai, 2022). Lack of opportunities for the development of communication skills is a serious problem for those students, whose primary job responsibilities will include communication and community outreach. Teachers need well-developed communication skills to organize effective communication with students, colleagues, and students’ families. Teachers also play an important role in building strong relations between the school and the community they serve. Among the school community outreach events are community service events, parent-teacher conferences, local events, etc. All the above mentioned requires excellent communication aptitude of teachers. However, pre-service primary school teachers are in disadvantage with the introduction of online learning due to lack of chances to actively participate in face-to-face communication and practice organizing outreach events. Moreover, the introduction of online learning has posed additional responsibility on teacher trainers. The core of the issue is that the quality of education could not be compromised when compared to brick-and-mortar campuses. Additionally, the approaches to implementing digital tools will be perceived as a model of instructional design by future teachers.

Aiming to enrich the previous research on the topic of developing online collaboration skills of pre-service teachers, the study was conducted to outline the system of developing pre-service teachers’ skills of digital collaboration. The study aims to address the following research questions:

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