

Chapter 3

Elementary School Teacher Training for Digital Citizenship in the English Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The chapter is a mixed-method study of knowledge, skills, and beliefs of pre-service elementary school teachers on digital citizenship. The quantitative data was gathered through surveying participants. The intervention in the form of a 30-hour module was introduced to participants to identify a change in perceptions. The qualitative data was obtained through the analysis of artefacts in the form of lesson plans. The author grounds the theoretical underpinning into the theory and principles of digital citizenship. The result of the posttest shows a positive change in the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of pre-service elementary school teachers on digital citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

Considerable attention of civic society has been paid to the digitalization of all spheres of life. Attention towards the development of 21st-century skills and growing digitalization have resulted in the creation of digital analogues of those skills. UNESCO during Mobile Learning Week in 2018 noted that digital skills alone cannot adequately respond to challenges imposed by a fast-developing society and economy. The holistic approach suggested by this organization provides for developing digital skills together with numeracy, literacy skills, as well as a set of skills referred to as digital citizenship skills (e.g. intrapersonal, interpersonal skills, critical and innovative thinking etc.) (UNESCO, 2018).

According to Becker (2019), this concept emerged in the 1990s as a response to the challenges of the cyber world and was used to denote the ‘hard skills’ instrumental in the digital environment. However,

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later the focus of the concept has changed. For instance, Mossberger et al. (2007) in their definition of digital citizenship focused on the ‘soft skills’, necessary for digital environments. Despite the fact that the concept was introduced a long time ago, the literature body devoted to it is still growing. For instance, a search of the keyword ‘digital citizenship’ in English in Google Scholar gives a rough result of 1,370,000 papers. As digital citizenship has been gaining importance on a global scale, there is a need for educational systems to implement this concept and teach it to a new generation of students.

This chapter aims to outline what digital citizenship is and identify the opinions of undergraduate pre-service teachers on digital citizenship, as well as feasible ways of informing them on how to teach elementary school students about digital citizenship.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The author finds it important to state their research positionality. This study is set in one of the Ukrainian universities. With the introduction of lockdown due to Covid-19 and the switch to blended and hy-flex learning in Ukraine due to Russian unprovoked aggression, there is a rapid development of various areas of elementary school students’ digital competence. However, digital citizenship is an under-researched notion in Ukrainian scholarly discourse and the author wants to raise awareness of it among pre-service teachers. The search for the Ukrainian equivalent of the notion of digital citizenship (“цифрове громадянство”) in Google Scholar returns only around 14,400 results. As a result, the author studies the global experience of teaching pre-service teachers about global citizenship and attempts to bring this knowledge into Ukrainian teacher training discourse. At the same time, the results of this study have replicability potential in any setting and are not restricted to the Ukrainian pre-service teacher system and can be of interest to teacher trainers and pre-service elementary school teachers.

Approaches to Defining the Notion of Digital Citizenship

The notion of digital citizenship is developing together with the development of digital technologies. In this section of the study, the author analyzes the main approaches to defining this concept.

The Applied Educational Systems define digital citizenship as the “responsible use of technology by anyone who uses computers, the Internet, and digital devices to engage with society on any level” (What Is Digital Citizenship & How Do You Teach It?, 2023). A similar approach to defining this concept is suggested by Ribble et al. (2004), who characterizes digital citizenship as norms of anticipated behavior when using technology. Similarly, Isin and Ruppert (2015) claim that individuals’ actions in the digital world make their identity as a digital citizen. UNESCO defines digital citizenship as “being able to find, access, use and create information effectively; engage with other users and with content in an active, critical, sensitive and ethical manner; and navigate the online and ICT environment safely and responsibly, being aware of one’s own rights” (UNESCO, 2017). Another similar definition is given by Canada’s Centre for Digital and Media Literacy, which defines digital citizenship as the ability to navigate digital environments in a way that’s safe and responsible and to actively and respectfully engage in these spaces (What is Digital Citizenship?, 2022). These definitions are focused on the importance of ethical engagement with the use of technology.

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