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The Role of Digital Competence in ELT

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ABSTRACT

Digital competence is a broad term that is regarded as one of the key competencies of a modern person of the 21st century who is able to use ICT for employment, learning, self-development and participation in society. This article defines the concept of digital competence and analyses the results of the level of digital competence of English teachers.

KEYWORDS: digital competence, level of digital competence, digital literacy, component, foreign language teaching.

Introduction

Digitalization as the main trend of the modern world has taken a leading position in education. As the educational process is undergoing digitalization, which requires updating approaches to teaching students foreign languages. In this regard, Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for the period of 2022-2026 and Law on Education (new version) puts forward the task of breakthrough scientific, technological and socio-economic development as strategic tasks. The main condition for such development is the modernization of the national educational system, aimed at preparing a graduate who is able to live and carry out his professional activities in a digital environment, taking into account the requirements for new professions and the changing value orientations of society. The solution of this problem involves increasing the requirements for the qualifications of teachers and their competence in the use of digital technologies for the design and implementation in the educational process. In Uzbekistan, the term information and communication competence is used instead of digital competence, which is understood as the readiness and ability to independently use modern information and communication technologies in pedagogical activities to solve a wide range of educational tasks.

The effectiveness of using digital technologies in the educational process has been proven by the practice of organizing distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital technologies made it possible to maintain the continuity of the educational process. Moreover, forced transition to distance learning has revealed the problems related to teachers' lack of competency in using digital technologies (Ahmad, 2012).

In this regard, the teachers should have the skills and abilities to organize the educational process in a digital environment and use digital technologies in their professional activities.

Materials and Methods

The concept of digital competence appeared because of the work of the European Commission on Education and Training. Digital literacy consists of the ability to access digital media and ICT, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of digital media and media contents and to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts. Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of ICT for employment, learning, self-development and participation in society. Krumsvik (2011) defines digital competence as the ability of teachers to use information and communication technologies (ICT) in a professional context, combined with a good pedagogical (didactic) understanding and awareness of its importance for learning strategies and the digital base of students. Yachina and Fernandez (2018) define the teacher's digital competence as general professional competence and understanding of the general structure and interaction of computer devices; understanding the potential of digital technologies for innovation; basic understanding of the reliability and reliability of the information received, and the ability to use programs for designing a training session". According Gaidamashko and Chepurnaya (2015), the competence in question is "the ability of an individual to critically, confidently, safely and effectively apply and choose communication technologies in all spheres of life, as well as his readiness for such activities". Based on the definitions to digital competence in terms of our article, we might define the digital competence of a teacher is the skills of effective use of new technologies.

In accordance with the European Qualification Framework, information and communication competence (digital competence), digital competence involves the following components:

1. **Information and data literacy:** To articulate information needs, to locate and retrieve digital data, information and content. To judge the relevance of the source and its content. To store, manage, and organise digital data, information and content.
2. **Communication and collaboration:** To interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity. To participate in society through public and private digital services and participatory citizenship. To manage one's digital presence, identity and reputation.
3. **Digital content creation:** To create and edit digital content. To improve and integrate information and content into an existing body of knowledge while understanding how copyright and licenses are to be applied. To know how to give understandable instructions for a computer system.
4. **Safety:** To protect devices, content, personal data and privacy in digital environments. To protect physical and psychological health, and to be aware of digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion. To be aware of the environmental impact of digital technologies and their use.
5. **Problem solving:** To identify needs and problems, and to resolve conceptual problems and problem situations in digital environments. To use digital tools to innovate processes and products. To keep up-to-date with the digital evolution.

When developing digital competence, the areas of application and assessment of its formation were determined in terms of the European Qualification Framework. One of the tools was a self-assessment grid, which can be used to assess one's own level of competence and determine the ways of self-development in this direction. A qualification framework (a framework) has been developed as a tool for application in the

professional area. The developers distinguished three levels of possession/formation of information and communication competence:

- Basic (basic user /A - Foundation),
- Medium (independent user / B - Intermediate)
- Advanced (proficient user / C - Advanced)

Based on this qualification framework, we analysed the level of ability of using digital technologies in the educational process. We conducted the survey method to study the awareness of foreign language teachers of six local universities in different regions about digital educational resources and platforms. Questionnaires showed significant deviations in the real knowledge of teachers, the necessary minimum awareness of educational platforms and the ability to use these platforms to ensure quality classes in the target language.

Results and Discussions

The results of our small research confirmed the expediency of organizing the training of foreign language teachers in order to develop the necessary digital literacy (competences) among them: with a sufficient number of digital educational resources and platforms, an objective need for organizing practice orientation was revealed based on five criterion of digital competence that we have developed.

The first criteria of digital competence is searching for information in the database of Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, which contain audio, video materials, textual information, electronic textbooks, manuals, online exercises, recommendations necessary for classes. They are suitable at different stages of learning, consolidating and repeating the material, as well as for self-testing the level of language proficiency. In the conditions of the information society, one of the effective means of optimizing the process of teaching foreign languages is constantly updated series of videos (podcasts) published on the Internet. They are available anytime, free of charge and easy to use.

The second criteria of digital competence is the improvement of work in office applications. Studies show that some teachers know only Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. The minimum amount of digital competencies for teachers is also the confident use of Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Whiteboard, Microsoft Outlook. While working in these applications, you can use simulator programs to develop certain skills, as well as to control the level of training. The use of specialized programs allows teachers to conduct effectively continuous, midterm and final controls.

The third criteria of digital competence is the ability to create presentations, visualize data - implies a graphical and visual representation of educational content and scientific research. The most common program used for visual materials is Microsoft PowerPoint and graphics from Microsoft Excel, but there are other programs that significantly expand the functionality of constructing and presenting data and are valuable for foreign language teachers: Quizlet, Kahoot, Padlet, Google forms, etc. Teachers can use them at any stage of the lesson in the formation of lexical and grammatical skills. This saves a lot of time and increases the efficiency and objectivity of control.

The fourth criteria of digital competence is the ability to use video conferencing tools: Zoom Meetings, Google meeting and Facebook Meeting Room in real time. They allow the conduct online presentations, work together with documents and applications, synchronously view websites, video files, images, implement differentiation of learning by working in small groups (session rooms), etc.

The fifth criteria of digital competence is the ability to create educational video content, it consists of several parts. The first one is recording educational content using Jing, iSpring tools. The second is the processing and editing of educational video content. After the material is ready, it must be posted on the Internet on YouTube or on social networks for students to use.

As a result of the study, we found out that digital competencies of foreign language teachers should be developed by organizing special trainings that prepares them for the confident and conscious use of information technology in the educational process.

Conclusion

In modern conditions, the use and ability to vary information and communication communication technologies is a need and a social order of today's modern society. In a broader sense, digital competence includes all types of pedagogical work in professional contexts where digital technologies are used. Main characteristics of digital competence of EFL teachers is the ability to develop / improve pedagogical work with the help of digital technology in a professional context, primarily in a web course / online learning. It is necessary to rely on the wide possibilities of using digital technologies in order to ensure the high efficiency of their activities in the future.

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