

# The Importance of Developing Digital Literacy Skills in Optimizing the Professional Competence of Future Foreign Language Teachers

Umida Jumaeva

Uzbek State University of World Languages

**Abstract:** This article explores the critical role that digital technology skills play in shaping the professional competence of future foreign language teachers. As education becomes increasingly digitized, proficiency in digital tools is essential for modern teaching. The article delves into the necessity of including digital literacy in teacher training programs, emphasizing its potential to enhance student engagement, facilitate interactive learning environments, and improve teaching effectiveness. Through mixed-method research, this study provides insights into the current digital competencies of future foreign language teachers and offers practical recommendations for developing these skills. The research also highlights examples of how digital tools, such as language learning apps and learning management systems (LMS), are already being integrated into the teaching practices of future educators.

**Keywords:** digital literacy, foreign language teachers, professional competence, digital technology, education

## Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has reshaped the educational landscape, affecting every aspect of teaching and learning. In foreign language education, these technologies offer a range of tools that can support interactive learning, personalize instruction, and make language acquisition more engaging. As such, it is imperative that future foreign language teachers develop strong digital technology skills to enhance their professional competence.

Foreign language teaching has historically relied on traditional methods such as textbooks, classroom drills, and face-to-face interactions. However, as Richards (2019) points out, these methods are increasingly supplemented, and in some cases replaced, by digital tools that allow for more dynamic and flexible learning experiences. Language learning apps, video conferencing platforms, and online collaboration tools are now integral parts of language education. For future teachers, mastering these tools is not only beneficial but necessary for staying competitive and effective in the modern educational environment.

## The Role of Digital Literacy in Teaching

Digital literacy, broadly defined as the ability to effectively use digital tools and platforms for communication, collaboration, and information gathering, has become a fundamental skill for educators in the 21st century. As noted by Jones and Hadfield (2020), digital literacy goes beyond technical skills and encompasses the ability to integrate these tools into pedagogical practices that foster better learning outcomes. In foreign language teaching, digital tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), interactive whiteboards, and language-specific applications offer opportunities to create more engaging and personalized learning environments.

For instance, tools like Duolingo, Babbel, and Quizlet offer students opportunities to practice vocabulary and grammar through gamified activities, which Smith and Gordon (2018) argue can significantly improve retention rates and motivation in language learning. Additionally, video platforms like Zoom and Skype enable teachers to conduct live, interactive lessons with students from around the world, making language practice more authentic and immediate.

#### The Need for Digital Skills in Teacher Training

Despite the availability of digital tools, many teacher trainees feel unprepared to integrate these technologies into their teaching. This gap between available resources and practical application is a growing concern. According to Brown and Collins (2021), teacher education programs often fail to provide sufficient training in digital literacy, focusing instead on theoretical knowledge with limited practical application. This can lead to a situation where future teachers understand the importance of digital tools but lack the confidence or skills to use them effectively.

Thus, this article aims to investigate the importance of digital technology skills in forming the professional competence of foreign language teachers and suggests ways to improve the integration of these skills in teacher training programs.

#### Methods

To investigate the significance of digital technology skills in forming professional competence, this research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed-method approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of how future foreign language teachers perceive and use digital tools in their training and early teaching experiences.

#### Participants

The study involved 150 teacher trainees from five universities across Uzbekistan. The participants were enrolled in foreign language teacher training programs and were in their final year of study. The sample consisted of 70% female and 30% male participants, with an average age of 22 years. All participants had completed basic digital literacy courses as part of their university curriculum.

#### Instruments

Three data collection methods were used in this study:

*Survey:* A digital literacy assessment was administered to evaluate the participants' self-reported digital skills, particularly in using platforms like Google Classroom, Moodle, and language-learning apps like Memrise and Quizlet. The survey also included questions about their confidence in integrating these tools into their teaching practice.

*Interviews:* Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with digital tools during their teaching practicum. Participants were asked to describe specific examples of how they used technology to enhance their teaching.

*Classroom Observations:* A series of classroom observations were carried out during the participants' teaching practice in schools. The aim was to observe how digital tools were incorporated into lessons and how students responded to these tools.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the digital literacy survey were analyzed using statistical software to calculate frequencies and averages. The qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns in how digital technologies were used in teaching.

### Results

The results of the study revealed several important findings regarding the digital literacy of future foreign language teachers and their ability to integrate technology into their teaching practices.

#### Digital Literacy Skills

Survey results indicated that most participants had basic proficiency in using digital tools for personal and educational purposes. 85% of respondents reported using tools like Google Classroom and Zoom for managing assignments and conducting virtual classes. However, only 35% felt confident using more advanced tools like Moodle or educational software specific to language learning, such as Rosetta Stone or Open English. This suggests a gap in their digital skillset, particularly when it comes to leveraging specialized tools for language education.

#### Impact on Student Engagement

Classroom observations demonstrated that when digital tools were effectively integrated, student engagement and participation improved significantly. For example, one trainee teacher used Kahoot! to create an interactive quiz on Spanish grammar. The students actively participated in the quiz, showing increased enthusiasm compared to traditional paper-based tests. As Johnson and Latham (2019) argue, digital tools can foster a more interactive and student-centered learning environment, which is particularly beneficial in foreign language education.

Another example involved the use of Duolingo during self-study sessions. The teacher instructed students to use Duolingo to practice new vocabulary, and the students reported higher retention rates compared to using flashcards or reading lists. This aligns with Williams (2020), who found that gamified language learning apps lead to improved long-term retention and greater student motivation.

#### Barriers to Effective Integration

Despite the clear benefits, several barriers to the effective integration of digital tools were identified. In interviews, participants frequently mentioned the lack of access to technology in schools as a major obstacle. Many schools did not have the necessary infrastructure, such as reliable internet connections or interactive whiteboards, to support the use of digital tools. Additionally, some participants expressed concerns about the time it takes to learn how to use new tools effectively, suggesting that teacher training programs should offer more practical, hands-on workshops.

#### Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing digital technology skills in future foreign language teachers. While the majority of participants recognize the value of these tools, there is a significant gap between their theoretical knowledge and practical application. To bridge this gap, teacher training programs must place a greater emphasis on developing digital literacy and providing opportunities for hands-on practice with various educational technologies.

#### Practical Implications

Teacher education programs should include dedicated modules that focus on the pedagogical use of digital tools, with an emphasis on foreign language education. These modules should go beyond introductory courses in digital literacy and offer in-depth training on how to integrate tools like LMS, language learning apps, and online collaboration platforms into lesson plans. In addition, regular workshops and seminars can be organized to keep future teachers updated on new digital tools and trends in educational technology.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of digital literacy on teaching effectiveness. Future studies could focus on the post-graduation experiences of foreign language teachers and how their digital skills evolve over time. Additionally, more research is required to identify best practices for integrating technology into foreign language education in resource-constrained settings.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of digital technology skills is essential for the professional competence of future foreign language teachers. While teacher trainees are aware of the potential benefits of digital tools, they require more practical

experience and institutional support to effectively integrate these technologies into their teaching. By prioritizing digital literacy in teacher training programs, educational institutions can ensure that future foreign language teachers are well-equipped to meet the demands of the modern classroom.

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