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Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Digital Literacy and Factors Affecting Digital Literacy Development

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Abstract

This study was intended to investigate pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy skills and factors affecting them in developing their digital literacy skills. Respondents participating in this research were the English Education Study Program students of a university in South Sumatra Province. They were in the fourth-year of study. Research data were collected through questionnaires. Research findings revealed that pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy was categorized above acceptable level. The main factors inhibiting them from developing digital literacy competence were a limited number of computers with online access on campus, no ICT training provided by the university for them, less practice of digital technology in teaching and learning activities, lack of budget to access the internet outside campus. Sustainable availability of digital resources at the campus, regular training of ICT on campus, and persistent integration of digital technologies in language learning seemed to be important develop their digital literacy skills.

Keywords

Digital literacy, digital immigrants, digital natives, pre-service EFL teachers

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Introduction

The 21st century is signaled by the blast of information where access to information is opened to all global citizens. The millennial generations, generations Y and Z, are benefited from this era where they are already accustomed to using digital technologies in their daily lives. They are the digital natives of this era. The education sector has been affected by digital technology too. Teaching and learning activities are not permanently performed face-to-face in the classroom; many of them are performed online. The covid-19 pandemic, indeed, has forced most daily activities including teaching and learning to be done online. This condition forces governments in many countries to prepare highly competent teachers to meet the demands. The question arising is “how to prepare highly qualified teachers in the 21st century” (Zhu & Zeichner, 2013, p. v).

The skills of the 21st century as explained by Trilling and Fadel (2009) are classified into three, i.e. learning skills, life skills, and literacy skills. Literacy skills covering information, media, and technology seem to have a vital role in the 21st century as this era is strongly related to digital technology. Being digitally literate is deemed necessary in order to survive in this era (Eshet-Alkalai & Amichai-Hamburger, 2004). As a part of the global citizens, Indonesian people need to be well prepared in coping with digital literacy, especially in relation to the education field. Specifically, Indonesian education must oblige digital literacy in its education policy so that Indonesian citizens can compete properly in this globalized world.

As specified in the Indonesian 1945 Constitution, one of the goals of Indonesian independence is to increase the standard of education for Indonesian citizens equally and reasonably. The development of national education, referring to this goal, is based on the paradigm of developing the whole Indonesian people who have the ability to optimally actualize human potentials in the 21st century. One important factor in determining qualified education is the teacher. Therefore, preparing EFL teachers with digital literacy’s knowledge and skills to respond to challenges of the 21st century education is considered very important.

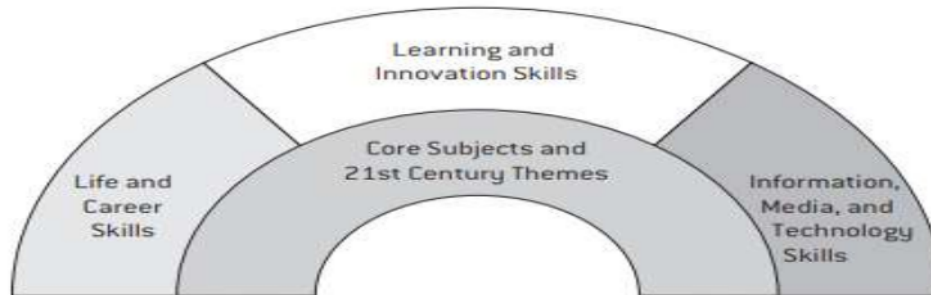
In responding to the demand of providing qualified EFL teachers who are digitally literate, some serious efforts need to be taken by educational institutions, for example, identifying current pre-service teachers’ digital literacy competence and manage ways to improve their digital literacy level. The central research questions in this study were “What are the current levels of Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers’ digital literacy skills?” and “What are the factors affecting Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers in developing their digital literacy during their study at university?”. Therefore, the writing of this article was aimed at exploring Indonesian pre-service EFL teachers’ current digital literacy skills and the factors affecting them in improving their digital literacy skills during their university studies.

Literature Review

The 21st century skills

The second decade of the 21st century is ending soon, so it seems to be the time to take a closer look at what is commonly called as 21st-century skills since teaching and learning are directly influenced by these skills. Teachers in schools need to be familiar with and incorporate these skills into the curriculum. Salpeter (2003) points out that learning in the 21st Century “articulates a vision of how schools can best prepare students to succeed in the 21st century” (p.1). Its emphasis is “what students can do with knowledge, rather than what units of knowledge they have” (Silva, 2009, p. 2). The question that arises is what skills the students need that enable them to do with knowledge. Three skills, most needed in the 21st century, are defined by Trilling and Fadel (2009) and Stauffer (2020). They include skills in learning and creativity, information, media, and technology, and life and career.

Figure 1. *The 21st century most demanded skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 48)*



From Trilling and Fadel’s (2009) and Stauffer’s (2020) points above, it can be inferred that digital technology is one of the important components of 21st-century skills. This condition is made more clearly by Chu, Reynolds, Tavares, Notari, and Lee (2017) who stress that one of the characteristics of 21st-century education is the proliferative use of technology.

3 *Digital literacy defined*

Digital literacy has been defined differently by many authors. Gilster (1997) is the one who firstly defined digital literacy as an “ability to understand information and--more important--to evaluate and integrate information in multiple formats that a computer can deliver” (as quoted by Pool, 1997, p. 6). Trilling and Fadel (2009) identify digital literacy as an ability to correctly and efficiently access, analyze, apply, handle data and data sources covering knowledge, media, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy. Meanwhile, the American Library Association’s digital-literacy task force as cited in Heitin (2016) defines it as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills”

(p. 5). Based on the three definitions above, it can be concluded that digital literacy refers to an ability to traverse and understand, presume, and interact via various digital platforms.

Digital literacy skills

From the definition made by Trilling and Fadel (2009) above, it is obvious that the skills covered by digital literacy are being literate in information, media, information, and communication technology (ICT). Likewise, Chetty et al. (2018) formulate digital literacy skills more specific, that is, literacies in information, computer, media, communication, and technology. All those skills are related to the use of technology. As proposed by Hatlevik and Christophersen (2013), digital literacy skills comprise the skills in using technology, applying technology to obtain, process, evaluate, produce, communicate information. In reality, those skills are not owned by most people in this millennial era, especially those who are digital immigrants. But there is no guarantee that the digital natives who are generally tech-savvy are digitally literate. They need to keep upgrading their knowledge and skills of the new development of digital technology. Regarding digital literacy skills, Chetty et al. (2018) further explain information literacy as the skill to “search, retrieve, manipulate, evaluate, synthesize and create digital content” (p. 9); computer or ICT literacy as the skill “to operate digital hardware and software” (p. 9); media literacy as the skill to “interact with textual, sound, images, videos, and social media” (p. 10); communication literacy as the skill “to communicate in traditional and innovative medium” (p. 10); and technology literacy as the skill “to adopt various technologies to a particular life situation” (p.10).

Importance of being digitally literate

Being digitally literate is important for most of the people in the world regardless they are digital immigrants or digital natives. In this digital era, the borders between/among countries are borderless and long-distance communication across countries and continents has been so simple because of the advancement of digital technology. Nowadays, almost every profession insists on skills of digital literacy at some point. The current development of the covid-19 pandemic has drastically affected schooling and working, changing the face-to-face meeting to be online meetings. This condition enforces many people to equip themselves with digital literacy skills in order to utilize technology to interact with others and/or among themselves (Spires et al., 2018).

Importance of being digitally literate for pre-service EFL teachers

Teachers’ digital literacy is also important in this era. The roles of teachers have changed “from being an instructor to becoming a constructor, facilitator, coach, and creator of learning environments” (Amin, 2016, p. 41). In other words, they encourage the growth of knowledge and skills of their students (Eryansyah, Erlina, Fiftinova, & Nurweni, 2019). To perform their current roles properly, they must increase their digital literacy. Once they are already digitally literate, they can guide students to use search engine optimally, guide students to be ideal digital citizens, minimize the digital divide among their students, motivate maximum use of digital media, and for themselves, they can choose appropriate

applications or tools for teaching and improve their standards of teaching (Ghosh, 2020). In brief, the use of digital technology in teaching has led to “improved students’ learning and better teaching methods” (Ciroma, 2014, p. 99).

There are two evidences that support the importance of being digitally literate for pre-service teachers. Firstly, a study done by Liza and Andriyanti (2020) found that many EFL teachers as well as pre-service EFL teachers were still digitally illiterate. They were not prepared to integrate digital technology in their English class. Secondly, some studies (Dashtestani, 2014; Fitriah, 2017; Hedayati & Marandi, 2014 as cited in Liza & Andriyanti, 2020) found that most teachers’ digital literacy skills are only limited to technical skills, operating the digital tools. They have low knowledge and skills in how to use digital technologies properly in teaching.

Another fact supporting pre-service EFL teachers’ digital literacy development is due to a high number of students today accessing the internet with their own gadgets. Therefore, as claimed by Maher (2020), the ways students devour and deliver information for their individual and educational uses are changing and the change needs to be supported by developing EFL teachers’ digital literacies including the pre-service EFL teachers as the prospective teachers in this digital era. This study was carried out to explore the readiness of EFL pre-service teachers to incorporate digital technology into their teaching by analyzing their current digital literacy competence and the factors that influence them to improve their digital literacy during their undergraduate study at the university.

Methodology

Research design, respondents, and sampling procedure

This survey study involved a group of pre-service EFL teachers from a public university in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The research participants were the fourth-year students of English Education Study Program, an education program under the faculty of teacher training and education. Their participation in this study was achieved through a convenience sampling method. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) define *convenience sample* as “a group of individuals who (conveniently) are available for study” (p. 99). They were convenient for this study since they were in their fourth year of study, which was the last year of study at an undergraduate program. They had fewer subjects to take compared to those in the third or second year of study. Therefore, they had more leisure time that they could spend by participating as respondents in this study. 74 participants participated in this study. The majority of them were female students. The composition of their genders is described in the table below.

Table 1. *Research participants’ gender*

Participant Gender			
Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
17	22.98%	57	77.02%

Data collection and analysis

In this study, the research data were collected by means of ready-made questionnaires that were adopted from Ravitz (2014). The questionnaires were used to gather data related to pre-service EFL teachers' current levels of digital literacy and factors influencing their digital literacy improvement during their undergraduate study at the university. The questionnaires were distributed to 74 (seventy-four) pre-service EFL teachers who were the respondents of this study through convenient sampling approach. They were given access to complete the questionnaire via Google Form from 1 to 30 June 2020.

There were six sections in the questionnaire. The first section asked pre-service EFL teachers' frequency of using digital devices where they were to choose one of the available options (all of the time, often, sometimes, rarely, never); the second section asked pre-service EFL teachers' frequency of using digital devices during studies where they were to choose one of the available options (almost daily, 1-3 times a week, 1-3 time a month, a few times a semester, and almost never); the third section asked about pre-service EFL teachers' frequency of using a computer and/or web applications during their studies where they were to choose one of the available options (very frequently, frequently, occasionally, rarely, very rarely, and never); the next section, section four, was about pre-service EFL teachers' self-rating of their current digital literacy competence where they were to choose one of the available options (very good, good, acceptable, poor, very poor, and do not know); the following section was about pre-service EFL teachers' attitude toward the use of digital technology in education where they were to rate their agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and the final section of the questionnaire was about pre-service EFL teachers' self-awareness of factors affecting their use of ICT in their studies at university where they were to choose any available factors affecting their digital literacy development during their study at university. Data collected from questionnaires were assessed using Google form focusing on high frequencies and percentages of responses made by the respondents. From the six sections of data gained from the questionnaires, only two sections of data findings were presented in this study to answer the two research questions stated under the introduction section. They were section 4 (pre-service EFL teachers' self-rating of their current digital literacy competence) to answer the first research questions and section 6 (factors affecting their digital literacy development) to answer the second research questions.

Ethical consideration

As the participants in this study were from a public university in South Sumatra Province, ethical concerns (access to research participants, informed consent, and confidentiality) were considered. To obtain access to the research participants, we, as the researchers in this study, received a written approval from the Dean of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of the public University to conduct this study. When we met with the research participants online via Zoom application to gather data, they were advised about the research goals and methods used benefits of their participation in the study, the signed agreement of their participation in the study, confidentiality of their participation in the study, and their rights to withdraw from the study.

Findings

Pre-service EFL teachers' current digital literacy skills

To answer the first research question (pre-service EFL teachers' current digital literacy competence), data from section 4 were analyzed where the participants rated their digital literacy competence themselves by choosing one of the options, i.e. very good, good, acceptable, poor, very poor, or do not know. The findings as seen in Table 2 below were presented in the forms of frequency and percentage from very good, good, acceptable, and poor categories only. If the frequencies and/or percentages of very good were high, the participants were categorized as having an excellent level of digital literacy skills; If the frequencies and/or percentages of good were high, they were considered having a good level of digital literacy skills; if the frequencies and/or percentages of acceptable were high, they were considered having an acceptable level of digital literacy skills; and if the frequencies and/or percentages of poor were high, they were considered having a low level of digital literacy skills.

Table 2. *Pre-service EFL teachers' current digital literacy skills*

Statements	Very Good		Good		Acceptable		Poor	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Microsoft Word	34	45.9	34	45.9	6	8.1	0	0.1
Microsoft Excel	11	14.9	29	39.2	26	35.1	8	10.8
Microsoft Access	19	25.7	12	16.2	22	29.7	21	28.4
Microsoft PowerPoint	29	39.2	29	39.2	16	21.6	0	0
Communication applications (e.g., Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meeting, Skype)	45	60.8	24	32.4	5	6.8	0	0
Learning management systems (e.g., Moodle, Canvas, Edu-Sharing)	9	12.2	20	27	27	36.5	18	24.3
Social networking services (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Goodreads)	54	73	17	23	3	4	0	0
Blogs	5	6.8	14	18.9	28	37.8	27	36.5
Podcasts	2	2.7	14	18.9	16	21.6	42	56.8
Online file sharing applications (e.g., Dropbox, Google drive)	21	28.4	33	44.6	18	24.3	2	2.7
Online photo sharing application (e.g., Picasa, Flickr, Google Photos)	10	13.7	20	27.4	26	35.6	18	23.3
Online video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Youku, YouNow, Tune)	27	37	31	42.5	14	19.2	2	1.3
Online web design applications (e.g., Dreamweaver, Figma, InVision Studio)	1	1.4	9	12.2	19	25.7	45	60.7
Search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo, Bing)	44	59.5	22	29.7	7	9.5	1	1.3
Online dictionary apps (e.g., Dictionary.com, U-Dictionary, Meriam Webster's)	30	40.5	32	43.2	11	14.9	1	1.4
Mean		30.8%		30.7%		22%		16.5%

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Factors affecting pre-service efl teachers' digital literacy development

Factors affecting pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy skill development can be seen in Table 3 below. These data were intended to answer the second research question (Factors affecting pre-service EFL teachers in developing their digital literacy during their study at university).

Table 3. *Factors affecting pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy development*

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Students' time constraints	34	47.3
Teachers' lack of knowledge	30	40.5
Teachers' lack of expertise	37	50
Teachers' lack of interest	24	32.4
Students' lack of training	44	59.5
Lack of supporting resources	49	66.2
Students' Lack of budget	57	77
Students' lack of knowledge	39	52.7
Students' lack of skills	35	47.3
Students' lack of interest	35	47.3
Lack of learning materials	30	40.5
Unavailability of facilities	68	91.9

Based on the information in Table 3 above, it could be seen that the biggest majority or 91.9% of the pre-service EFL teachers considered that lack of facilities of digital devices available on campus was the main important factor affecting their digital literacy skills development. The second important factor affecting their digital literacy skill development was students' lack of budget as claimed by 77% of them. Lack of supporting resources was considered the next factor as claimed by 66.2% of them. More than half or 59.5% of them considered a lack of training on digital literacy technology was the next factor affecting their digital literacy development. About half of them (52.7%) considered a lack of knowledge and another half (50%) considered teachers' lack of skills are the other factors affecting them from developing their digital literacy skills. Meanwhile, less than half of them considered their lack of interest in digital technology (47.3%), their lack of knowledge (47.3%), their lack of time (47.3%) and, teachers' lack of knowledge (40.5%), and lack of learning materials (40.5%) as the other factors affecting their digital literacy skill development.

Discussion

Based on the information described in Table 2 above, it could be seen that in general, the majority of the pre-service EFL teachers involved in this study were in excellent and good levels of their digital literacy skills. Most of them were excellent in using social networking services (73%), communication applications (60.8%), web search engines (59.5%). There were less than half (45.9%) of them who were excellent in using word

processor application. Also, data from the table above revealed that less than half (45.9%) of the pre-service EFL teachers were in a good level of using word processor, 44.6% of them were in good level of using online file sharing applications, 42.5% of them were good in using video sharing online. In contrast, data from the table above showed that more than half (60.7%) of the pre-service EFL teachers were in a poor level of using web design applications, less than half (56.8%) of them were poor in using podcasts.

Based on the description of the findings above, it could be concluded that pre-service EFL teachers' current digital literacy skills were between good and excellent categories. This fact could be seen from the mean of percentages at each level (see the last line of the table) where 30.8% of the pre-service EFL teachers' current digital literacy skill level was in the excellent category and 30.7% of them was in a good category. As the percentage of those in excellent category and those in good category were almost the same, the total combination of those two percentages were 61.5%, in general, indicated that more than half of the respondents were categorized above acceptable level of digital literacy.

From the data obtained from Table 3 above, it was apparent that many crucial factors were affecting pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy skill development. Those factors could be grouped into three. They were from the pre-service EFL teachers themselves, their lecturers, and the campus. Three important factors from campus were unavailability of digital devices on campus that could be assessed by the students for free, their literacy of digital technology did not develop properly as there were no supporting resources, either. In addition, the campus did not provide any training related to the use of digital technology. These three factors hindered the students from developing their digital literacy skills on campus. From the pre-service EFL teachers themselves, five factors were affecting them from developing their digital literacy skills properly. Those factors were students' lack of budget, knowledge, skills, interest, and time. Three important factors from the lecturers' side were lecturers' lack of knowledge, skills, and interest. Among the three groups of factors, the pre-service EFL teachers considered those from the university side were the most important factors.

Conclusions

The study narrated in this article was focused on the investigation of pre-service EFL teachers' current digital literacy level to keep up with the needs of 21st century education. To meet the demands, their current levels of digital literacy and factors affecting them from developing their digital literacy skill properly were investigated. Research findings showed that the majority of them were above the acceptable level. More than 30% of them were at an excellent level and another 30% were at a good level of digital literacy skills. The main factors affecting their digital literacy development were the unavailability of digital devices free to access for them and no supporting resources and lack of training in using digital devices for study. This condition became worse because the majority of them were lack of budget to buy digital devices and subscribe to broadband and their lecturers were lack of knowledge and interest in digital technology. All these factors seem to explain why there were only a small percentage of the total pre-service EFL teachers involved as respondents in this study were at excellent level of their digital literacy.

This study is aware of certain limitations, i.e. small number of samples, time restrictions, less diverse instruments used, and non-generalizable research findings. However, its findings have also given useful information. The authors, therefore, suggest further analysis of the research topic with more samples, different research methods, and a longer duration of time to carry out the study. As a result, a more generalized inference can be reached on pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy to keep up with the demands of 21st century education.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to the publication of this article.

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