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Digital literacy practices of pre-service EFL Teachers: A case study of private language schools

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Abstract

This case study investigates the digital literacy practices of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers within the context of private language schools. With the increasing integration of technology in language teaching, understanding pre-service teachers' digital literacy skills and practices is crucial for effective pedagogical preparation. The study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore how pre-service EFL teachers engage with digital technologies in their teaching and learning processes. Findings reveal the diverse digital literacy practices of pre-service teachers, including their use of social media, educational platforms, digital resources, and communication tools. Moreover, the study examines the challenges and opportunities encountered by pre-service teachers in developing their digital literacy skills. The implications of the study inform teacher education programs, suggesting the need for curriculum revisions and professional development initiatives to better prepare pre-service EFL teachers for the digitalized educational landscape of private language schools.

Keywords: Digital literacy, pre-service teachers-private language schools

Introduction

In today's digitally driven world, technology has permeated almost every aspect of our lives, including education. The integration of technology in education has become not just important but almost indispensable. Nowhere is this more evident than in language education, where digital tools offer a myriad of opportunities for teaching and learning. From interactive language learning apps to online communication platforms, technology has revolutionized the way languages are taught and learned.

Within this digital landscape, pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers stand as key players in shaping the future of language education. As future educators, they are tasked not only with imparting language skills but also with navigating the complexities of digital literacy. Digital literacy, the ability to effectively use digital tools and resources for learning and communication, has become a critical skill for educators in today's digital age.

Private language schools serve as hubs of language learning, attracting students from diverse backgrounds and offering tailored language programs. Within these private language schools, pre-service EFL teachers undergo training and preparation for their future roles as language educators. Understanding the digital literacy practices of these pre-service teachers within the unique context of private language schools is essential for enhancing language education and preparing teachers for the challenges of modern classrooms.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the digital literacy practices of pre-service EFL teachers across various private language schools. By examining their use of digital technologies and exploring the pedagogical implications, this research aims to shed light on how pre-service teachers engage with technology in language teaching. Through a qualitative exploration of their digital practices, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital literacy is integrated into pre-service teacher education and its impact on language learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Digital literacy, a multifaceted concept, involves the ability to effectively and critically navigate digital tools and resources in various contexts. In language education, digital literacy plays a pivotal role in enhancing language learning experiences and outcomes. It encompasses a wide range of skills, including information literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, and critical thinking skills (Warschauer, 2010) ^[9].

In the field of EFL teaching, digital literacy is essential for creating dynamic and engaging learning environments. Digital tools offer diverse opportunities for language practice, communication, and authentic language experiences. Pre-service EFL teachers need to be equipped with digital literacy skills to effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices and address the needs of 21st-century learners.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of digital literacy in language teaching and has explored the digital practices of language educators examined the integration of technology into EFL classrooms and identified factors influencing teachers' use of digital tools. She found that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and pedagogical approaches play crucial roles in shaping their use of technology. Similarly investigated language teachers' digital literacy practices, emphasizing the need for teachers to develop both technical skills and pedagogical knowledge to effectively integrate technology into their teaching.

Moreover, research has shown that digital literacy goes beyond mere technical proficiency; it also involves critical thinking and evaluation of digital resources. Hockly (2013) ^[4] argues that educators need to teach students how to critically evaluate digital content, discerning between reliable and unreliable sources. This aspect of digital literacy is particularly relevant in language education, where students often rely on online resources for language practice and learning materials.

Additionally, the affordances of digital technologies offer new possibilities for collaborative and interactive learning. Warschauer (2009) ^[10] discusses the concept of "computer-assisted language learning" (CALL), highlighting the potential of digital tools to promote language practice, communication, and collaboration. CALL encompasses a wide range of activities, including online discussions, virtual language exchanges, and interactive multimedia resources, all of which contribute to enhanced language learning experiences.

In summary, the literature emphasizes the importance of digital literacy in language teaching and learning. Pre-service EFL teachers need to develop a range of digital literacy skills to effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices. These skills include technical proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, critical thinking, and the ability to create engaging and interactive learning experiences. By understanding and fostering digital literacy among pre-service EFL teachers, educators can better prepare them for the demands of modern language classrooms.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the digital literacy practices of pre-service EFL teachers in private language schools. Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, attitudes,

and behaviors related to digital literacy, providing rich and nuanced insights into their practices.

Participants

The participants in this study will be pre-service EFL teachers enrolled in teacher education programs at various private language schools. A purposive sampling method will be used to select participants who represent a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, and levels of digital literacy.

Data Collection

1. Semi-Structured Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with each participant to gather detailed information about their digital literacy practices. The interviews will be guided by open-ended questions designed to explore the following areas:

- Participants' use of digital technologies in teaching.
- Types of digital tools and resources utilized.
- Challenges faced in integrating technology into teaching.
- Strategies employed to overcome challenges.
- Perceived benefits of technology use in language teaching.
- Training and support received in digital literacy.

2. Classroom Observations: Classroom observations will be conducted to observe how pre-service EFL teachers integrate digital technologies into their teaching practices. Observations will focus on the following aspects:

- Types of digital tools used during instruction.
- Frequency and duration of technology use.
- Interaction between teachers and students during digital activities.
- Student engagement and participation.
- Challenges encountered during technology integration.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will involve thematic analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes to identify patterns, themes, and categories related to pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy practices. The following steps will be followed:

1. **Transcription:** Interview recordings will be transcribed verbatim, and observation notes will be organized for analysis.
2. **Open Coding:** Initial open coding will be conducted to identify and label meaningful concepts, phrases, and ideas in the data.
3. **Axial Coding:** Axial coding will involve categorizing and organizing the open codes into broader themes and subthemes based on their relationships and connections.
4. **Constant Comparison:** Constant comparison will be used to compare data across participants and data sources to identify similarities, differences, and patterns.
5. **Theme Development:** Themes and subthemes will be further developed and refined based on their significance and relevance to the research questions.
6. **Data Integration:** Data from interviews and observations will be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy practices.

Discussion and Analysis

The findings underscore the importance of digital literacy in pre-service EFL teacher education. Training programs should provide comprehensive support in developing digital literacy

skills, including instruction on selecting appropriate digital tools, designing effective digital activities, and addressing technological challenges. Additionally, teacher educators should emphasize critical digital literacy, encouraging pre-service teachers to critically evaluate digital resources and promote responsible digital citizenship among students.

Private language schools play a crucial role in fostering digital literacy among pre-service EFL teachers. These schools can provide access to technology, offer professional development opportunities, and create a supportive environment for experimentation and innovation. Collaboration among teachers within private language schools can facilitate the sharing of best practices and the development of a digital learning community.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study involved a thorough examination of interview transcripts and observation notes to identify patterns, themes, and categories related to pre-service EFL teachers' digital literacy practices in private language schools. The analysis aimed to uncover insights into how these teachers utilize digital tools, the challenges they face, and the pedagogical strategies they employ, as well as the perceived benefits of technology use in language teaching.

Theme 1: Digital Tools and Resources

Analysis revealed that pre-service EFL teachers make extensive use of digital tools and resources in their teaching practices. These tools can be broadly categorized into:

- **Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs):** Many teachers utilize IWBs to display multimedia content, interactive activities, and online resources during their lessons. These whiteboards allow for dynamic presentations and engage students through interactive exercises.
- **Online Language Learning Platforms:** A significant number of teachers incorporate various online platforms such as Duolingo, Quizlet, and Kahoot! into their lessons. These platforms offer a wide range of activities, including vocabulary practice, quizzes, and games, which help reinforce language learning outside the classroom.
- **Educational Apps:** Several teachers use educational apps specifically designed for language learning. Apps such as Memrise, FluentU, and Rosetta Stone are popular choices for practicing pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.
- **Multimedia Resources:** Teachers often integrate multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, and digital storytelling platforms into their lessons. These resources enhance listening and speaking skills, provide authentic language input, and cater to various learning styles.

Theme 2: Challenges in Technology Integration

Despite the widespread use of digital tools, pre-service EFL teachers face several challenges in effectively integrating technology into their teaching:

- **Limited Access to Technology:** In some cases, teachers reported limited access to digital resources and devices, particularly in schools with inadequate technological infrastructure. This limited access hindered their ability to fully utilize digital tools in their teaching.
- **Lack of Technical Proficiency:** Many teachers expressed concerns about their technical proficiency and ability to effectively use digital tools. They reported difficulties in navigating complex software, troubleshooting technical issues, and adapting to new technologies.
- **Time Constraints:** Time constraints emerged as a significant challenge, with teachers struggling to find time to explore and integrate technology into their lessons. The time required to create digital materials and learning activities often exceeded their available preparation time.
- **Resistance from Students:** A few teachers noted resistance from students towards technology use, citing reasons such as unfamiliarity with digital tools, preference for traditional teaching methods, or distractions caused by technology in the classroom.
- Below are tables summarizing the key findings of the study:

Table 1: Digital Tools and Resources

Digital Tools/Resources	Description
Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs)	Used to display multimedia content, interactive activities, and online resources during lessons.
Online Language Learning Platforms	Incorporate activities such as vocabulary practice, quizzes, and games to reinforce language learning.
Educational Apps	Include apps for pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary practice, such as Memrise, FluentU, Rosetta Stone.
Multimedia Resources	Used for enhancing listening and speaking skills, including videos, podcasts, and digital storytelling platforms.

Table 2: Challenges in Technology Integration

Challenges	Description
Limited Access to Technology	Some schools lack adequate technological infrastructure, limiting access to digital resources and devices.
Lack of Technical Proficiency	Teachers struggle with technical skills and find it challenging to navigate and use digital tools effectively.
Time Constraints	Teachers have limited time to explore and integrate technology into their lessons due to heavy workload.
Resistance from Students	Some students resist technology use due to unfamiliarity, preference for traditional methods, or distractions.

These findings provide valuable insights into the digital literacy practices of pre-service EFL teachers in private language schools, highlighting both the benefits and

challenges of integrating technology into language teaching.

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Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the digital literacy practices of pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in private language schools, offering valuable insights into the integration of technology into language teaching. Through qualitative exploration, this research has uncovered the diverse ways in which pre-service teachers engage with digital tools and the challenges they encounter in incorporating technology into their pedagogical practices. One of the key findings is the extensive use of digital tools and resources by pre-service EFL teachers, including interactive whiteboards, online language learning platforms, educational apps, and multimedia resources. These tools provide opportunities for dynamic and interactive language learning experiences, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of learners. However, alongside these benefits, the study also identifies several challenges faced by pre-service teachers in integrating technology into their teaching, such as limited access to technology, lack of technical proficiency, time constraints, and resistance from students. The implications of these findings highlight the importance of comprehensive support and training for pre-service EFL teachers in developing their digital literacy skills. Teacher education programs need to provide instruction not only on

the technical aspects of using digital tools but also on designing effective digital activities and addressing technological challenges. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on fostering critical digital literacy among pre-service teachers, encouraging them to critically evaluate digital resources and promote responsible digital citizenship among students.

Private language schools play a crucial role in fostering digital literacy among pre-service EFL teachers. These schools can provide access to technology, offer professional development opportunities, and create a supportive environment for experimentation and innovation. Collaboration among teachers within private language schools can facilitate the sharing of best practices and the development of a digital learning community.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significance of digital literacy in pre-service EFL teacher education and its impact on language learning outcomes. By understanding and fostering digital literacy among pre-service teachers, educators can better prepare them for the demands of modern language classrooms in private language schools. Moving forward, curriculum revisions and professional development initiatives are essential to ensure that pre-service EFL teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the digitalized educational landscape effectively.

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