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The Synergy of Digital Literacy and Communicative Competence in English Language Education

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between digital literacy and communicative competence in English among 25 Uzbek undergraduate EFL learners, using a correlational research design. Digital literacy, including the ability to use digital tools for communication and information processing, was evaluated through practical tasks and self-assessment surveys. Communicative competence was assessed through role-play, group discussions, and writing tasks. The results revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r=0.957r = 0.957r=0.957$, $p<.001p < .001p<.001$), showing that participants with higher digital literacy showed greater communicative competence. These findings highlight the synergistic relationship between digital literacy and language proficiency, emphasizing the importance of integrating digital literacy into English language classes. The study also emphasizes on the potential of integrating digital tools to combine language learning in real-world contexts, contributing to the development of technology-integrated pedagogical strategies.

Keywords: **d**igital literacy, communicative competence, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), language education, technology integration, bilingual literacy.

Introduction

For many years now, researchers of English language education field have emphasized the important role of digital literacy in encouraging communicative competence. Digital literacy, shown as the ability to effectively use digital tools, platforms, and technologies for communication, collaboration, and information processing, has developed as a foundational skill in 21st-century education. Scholars have argued that teaching English in a digital context not only enhances language acquisition but also prepares learners to navigate through an increasingly interconnected and technologically driven world. Consequently, a growing body of

research has highlighted the importance of integrating digital literacy into communicative language teaching frameworks. One particularly promising area for applying a digital literacy approach is in the development of communicative competence among English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The work of Warschauer and Healey (1998) laid the groundwork for computer-assisted language learning, as a result recent studies (Reinders & Benson, 2017) have searched to align digital literacy with real-world language use. However, this alignment has mainly focused on integrating technology for language exposure and practice. Although it has been argued that students should engage with authentic digital communication types (Godwin-Jones, 2018; Kessler, 2018), these recommendations often lack practical, classroom-ready strategies for systematically incorporating digital tools into communicative language instruction.

An alternative framework, which offers a more structured and integrative approach to blending digital literacy and communicative competence, has been proposed by Pegrum (2014). This framework emphasizes the connection between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge to encourage meaningful language use in digital contexts. However, as Pegrum's model is more theoretical than practical, many teachers report difficulty in adapting it to everyday classroom scenarios (Reinders, 2020). At its core, this framework underscores the need for tasks that engage learners in authentic, purposeful communication while simultaneously developing their digital competencies (Dudeney et al., 2013). Despite its potential, a user-friendly, systematic approach for classroom implementation remains underdeveloped. Thus, this study aims to explore the effects of a practical, teacher- and student-friendly method that integrates digital literacy into communicative language teaching. By adapting Pegrum's (2014) framework, the study investigates whether such an approach can enhance L2 learners' communicative competence in English. For this reason, this research is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent does integrating digital literacy into English language instruction improve L2 learners' communicative competence?

By addressing this question, this study seeks to contribute to the growing field of digital language pedagogy and offer practical solutions for educators aiming to prepare learners for communication in a digitally connected world.

Methods

Participants

The study involved 25 undergraduate students aged between 18 and 23 years. All participants were enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at a university in Uzbekistan and were native Uzbek speakers. Their English proficiency ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate levels, as determined by standardized placement tests. The participants were selected based on their familiarity with digital tools and platforms, ensuring a baseline level of digital literacy. The gender distribution was approximately 80% female and 20% male, and all participants had demonstrated consistent academic performance in previous English courses.

Research Design

This study explored the relationship between digital literacy and communicative competence in English, using a correlational research design to examine associations between these variables. The independent variable, digital literacy, was measured on a continuous scale to capture participants' proficiency in using digital tools for educational and communicative purposes. The dependent variable, communicative competence in English, was also assessed on a continuous scale, reflecting students' ability to use English effectively in diverse contexts. Participants completed two tasks designed to assess their digital literacy and communicative competence. The first task involved evaluating digital literacy through a combination of practical activities and a self-assessment survey. These activities included navigating online resources, composing emails, and participating in collaborative online discussions. The second task assessed communicative competence through role-play exercises, group discussions, and writing tasks requiring contextual understanding and pragmatic language use. By integrating digital literacy assessments with communicative language tasks, the study provided valuable insights into how digital skills influence language use in real-world scenarios, contributing to the development of pedagogical strategies for EFL learners in technologically advanced environments.

Scoring Procedures

The scoring framework for this study incorporated assessments of both digital literacy and communicative competence. Each component was evaluated based on clearly defined criteria:

Digital Literacy Task

1. Practical activities were scored on the scale of 0 to 5 points each, with evaluations based on task completion, accuracy, and efficiency.
2. The self-assessment survey included Likert-scale items, scored from 1 (low proficiency) to 5 (high proficiency), focusing on participants' confidence and frequency of digital tool use.
3. The total score for digital literacy ranged from 0 to 50 points, combining practical activity results and survey responses.

Communicative Competence Task

1. Speaking activities (e.g., role-play and group discussions) were scored on a scale of 0 to 10 points, assessed on fluency, coherence, vocabulary use, and interactional effectiveness.
2. Writing tasks were scored on a scale of 0 to 10 points each, based on clarity, organization, grammatical accuracy, and contextually appropriate language use.
3. The total score for communicative competence ranged from 0 to 50 points.

To ensure scoring consistency, two independent raters evaluated participants' performance. Discrepancies between raters were resolved by a third evaluator. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, ensuring that the scoring process was both reliable and valid. This robust scoring method reinforced the credibility of the findings and supported the study's exploration of the synergy between digital literacy and communicative competence.

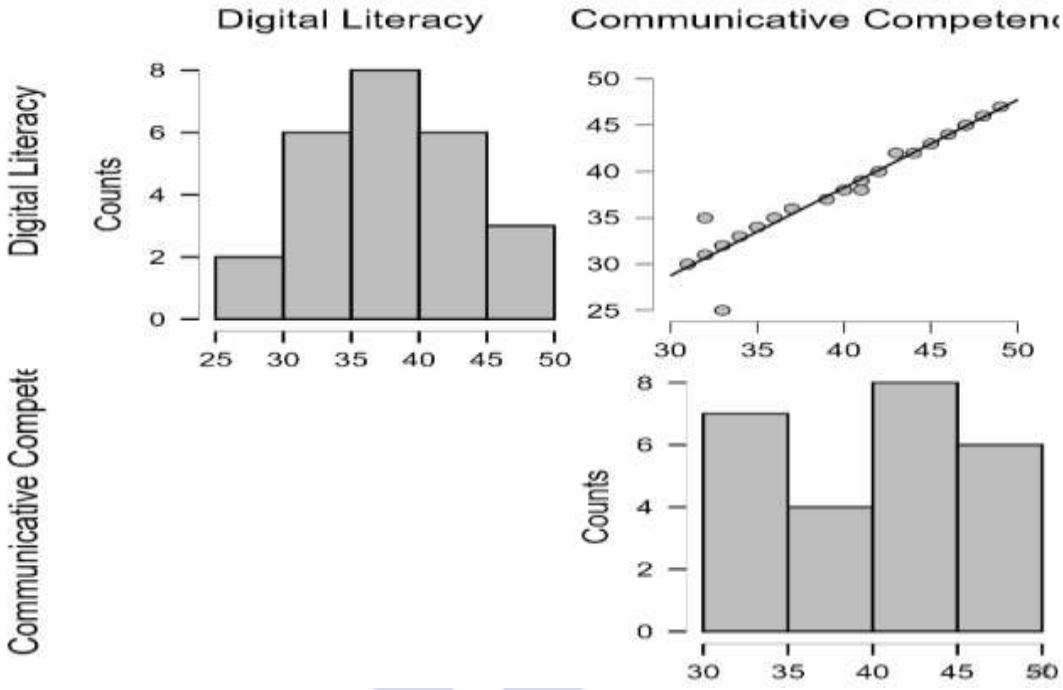
Results and discussion

The correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between digital literacy and communicative competence in English, with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of r=0.957r = 0.957r=0.957 and a ppp-value of <.001< .001<.001. This result indicates a robust association between participants' ability to effectively use digital tools and their proficiency in using English for communication. Specifically, participants who scored higher in digital literacy tended to demonstrate higher levels of communicative competence. The high r-value suggests that digital literacy skills account for a substantial proportion of the variance in communicative competence, affirming the hypothesis that technological

proficiency enhances language use in contextually meaningful ways. The statistical significance of the p-value (<.001< .001<.001) confirms that this relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance, providing strong evidence for the validity of the observed correlation.

Pearson's Correlations

Variable		Communicative Competence	Digital Literacy
1. Communicative Competence	Pearson's r	—	
	p-value	—	
2. Digital Literacy	Pearson's r	0.957	—
	p-value	< .001	—



The findings of this study underscore the critical role of digital literacy in fostering communicative competence in English. The strong positive relationship observed aligns with existing theories of language learning in digital environments (Warschauer, 2010; Godwin-Jones, 2018), which highlight the transformative potential of digital tools in creating authentic and interactive language-learning experiences. Participants who demonstrated higher proficiency in navigating and using digital platforms also exhibited enhanced abilities to communicate effectively in English, suggesting a synergistic relationship between these skills. These results support the notion that digital literacy extends beyond technical skills to encompass the ability to interact, create, and analyze content in meaningful ways, which are

essential components of communicative competence. The findings are consistent with Dudeney et al.'s (2013) framework, which posits that digital tools can scaffold language use by providing real-world contexts and opportunities for collaborative engagement. From a pedagogical perspective, these results suggest that integrating digital literacy development into English language curricula can significantly enhance students' communicative abilities. For instance, tasks involving online collaboration, digital storytelling, or participation in virtual discussions can provide learners with opportunities to practice language use while building critical digital skills. By aligning classroom activities with real-world technological demands, educators can better prepare students for global communication challenges. The study's implications extend beyond English language teaching to broader educational contexts, where fostering digital literacy is increasingly viewed as integral to lifelong learning. The findings suggest that targeted interventions to develop digital proficiency may yield substantial benefits for communicative competence in other languages as well.

Conclusion and limitations

Future research should expand on these findings by exploring how specific components of digital literacy—such as information evaluation, content creation, or online interaction—impact communicative competence. Additionally, studies involving diverse learner populations and varying levels of digital proficiency could provide further insights into how these skills interact across different contexts. For example, examining the relationship between digital literacy and communicative competence in under-studied language pairings, such as Uzbek-English, could illuminate unique cross-cultural dynamics and enhance our understanding of bilingual and digital literacy development. By investigating these areas, researchers can contribute to the development of more effective, inclusive, and technology-integrated language teaching methodologies, paving the way for deeper insights into the interplay between technology and language education.

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