

## **DIGITAL AND MEDIA COMPETENCES: KEY COMPETENCES FOR EFL TEACHERS**

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### **Abstract**

The usefulness of ICT in language learning is unquestionable nowadays. There are many digital educational resources available for foreign and second language teachers, materials which are progressively acquiring an important role in the teaching-learning process.

In order to respond to the increasing presence of such technologies in the classroom, teachers need to acquire digital and media competences, two key elements for lifelong training process. However, these are superficially addressed in teacher education. In this light, both in-training and in-service educators demand more skills and specific training to be able to teach students how to use technologies and, ultimately, help them develop their own digital and media competences.

Following an exhaustive bibliographical revision of scientific literature in the field, this theoretical paper seeks to revise the concepts of digital and media competences as well as to reflect on how superficially they are addressed at universities and teacher-training centres. After this, the importance of both competences as key elements for teachers is brought to light, as well as some useful suggestions to help foreign and second language teachers acquire and develop them and, simultaneously, teach them to their students.

**Keywords:** ICT; digital competence; media competence; ESL/EFL teachers; teachers' professional needs

### **1. Introduction**

Education has evolved driven by the economic, political and social development of nations all around the world. At this juncture, new technological paradigms have emerged (Sanz & Pantoja, 2015). Although these transformations and changes have always been present at schools, their strength has dramatically increased during the last years due to forces re-configuring the economic and social reality of the world (Caldevilla, 2011; Casani & Rodríguez, 2015). In this context, both developed and developing countries are investing large

amounts of money, time and effort in improving their education systems by changing curricula and training programs, improving facilities and supporting educational research, among other actions (Baglieri, Baldi & Tucci, 2018; Munari, Sobrero & Toschi, 2018).

Technology is an important construct for 21<sup>st</sup>-century citizens. In this light, the research line *Educational Technology* has emerged with the objective to respond to the needs of this new society and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This so-called field seeks to integrate ICT in the teaching-learning process as a support tool combined with the new teaching methodologies where the teacher acts more as a guide for students than as a mere presenter of contents (Rodríguez & Gómez, 2017). In this context, education cannot be understood without the help of technology anymore (Tejada & Fernández, 2018).

This theoretical paper seeks to revise the concepts of digital and media competences by following an exhaustive bibliographical revision of scientific literature in the field. It also aims to reflect on how superficially they are addressed at universities and teacher-training centres and, ultimately, to propose some useful suggestions that help foreign and second language teachers acquire and develop them and, simultaneously, teach them to their students.

## **2. The role of competences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

As stated by the European Parliament and the Council (2006) and the Instituto Cervantes (2012), *digital competence* is one of the key competences of lifelong learning and second/foreign language teaching. However, what is understood by the word “competence”?

A competence is more than just knowledge or skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competence that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating (OECD, 2005, p. 4).

In the last decades, competences have become essential elements at all stages of education, both formal and non-formal (Gutiérrez & Serrano, 2016). In this sense, current Spanish educational legislation establishes that a curriculum must include “the competences and capacities for the integral application of the contents proper to each teaching and education stage in order to ensure the appropriate performance of activities and the effective resolution of problems” (LOMCE, 2013, translated in Gutiérrez & Serrano, 2016, p. 51).

These competences can be numerous (Peklaj, 2015); nevertheless, some of the essential competences that teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need are: subject and teaching skills, the ability to

link theory with practice, co-operation and collaboration with other colleagues, self-confidence, leadership, continuous learning and digital knowledge (Hepp, Prats & Holgado, 2015, p. 33).

Knowing what a competence is, and considering the types mentioned above, it is necessary to think about which competences teachers need in order to not only become digitally literate (i.e. having the knowledge of how to use digital technology appropriately), but also to be able to integrate ICT into their teaching (Esteve-Mon, Gisbert-Cerbera & Lázaro-Cantabrana, 2016, p. 39). In this respect, despite the diverse definitions due to different agendas (Fraser, Atkins & Richard, 2013; Gutiérrez, Prendes & Castañeda, 2015; Hepp, Prats & Holgado, 2015; Masanet, Contreras & Ferrés, 2013; Nogueira-Frazão & Martínez-Solana, 2018; Scolari, Masanet, Guerrero-Pico & Establés, 2018), *digital competence* and *media competence* seem to be two of the most relevant (Maldonado, 2018). Evidence suggests, however, that teacher education institutions still have some ground to break before they completely include these into their practice (cf. Benson & Filippaios, 2015; Benson, Morgan, & Filippaios, 2014; Moreno, Navarro, Trench, & Zerfass, 2015; Novakovich, Miah, & Shaw, 2017). For this reason, this paper aims at reflecting on the concepts of *digital competence* and *media competence*, to show how superficially they are usually addressed at universities and teacher-training centres. Ultimately, proposals to facilitate their acquisition and development English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) teachers are also presented.

### **3. The study**

To respond to the objective of the study, specific data collection and analysis methods were adopted.

#### **3.1. Data collection**

The revision was focused on ESL/EFL teachers and intended to reflect on the concepts of digital and media competences, and the way universities and teacher-training centres develop them in their syllabuses. In order to ensure the relevance of the review, selection of papers were carried out by considering seven main criteria: (1) works published in the last decade (period 2009-2018) and (2) indexed by Google Scholar, Scopus and Dialnet; (3) both empirical and non-empirical studies such as literature reviews and conceptual papers were analysed; (4) the keywords used were “digital competence”, “digital literacy”, “media competence”, “media literacy”, “teacher competences” and “21<sup>st</sup> century competences”; (5) studies both in Spanish and English were included for this review; (6) studies related to the fields of language

education, teacher training and educational technology were utilized; and (7) books, book chapters, journal articles, official documents and reports were used.

The papers were analysed by the three researchers in three different phases in order to guarantee that all were triple-checked. In particular, research methods, study foci, and results were analysed. In case of disagreement, the three researchers discussed and negotiated the results of each phase of the analysis until they reached a consensus about the relevance of the paper. The study included a total of 68 relevant papers. Table 1 shows the distribution of texts by type, including number and percentage:

Table 1. Distribution of texts by type (own elaboration)

	No. of Texts	%
Books	8	11.76
Book chapters	8	11.76
Journal articles	40	58.83
Official documents, reports and others	12	17.65

### 3.2. Data analysis

As mentioned before, the papers under analysis were published between 2009 and 2018. 3 out of 70 articles (4.41%) were published in 2009; 4 (5.88%) were published in 2010; 6 (8.82%) were published in 2011; 5 (7.35%) in 2012; 7 (10.29%) in 2013; 2 (2.94%) in 2014; 9 (13.24%) in 2015; 11 (16.18%) in 2016; 9 (13.24%) in 2017; and 12 (17.65%) in 2018. Figure 1 shows the distribution of texts per year.

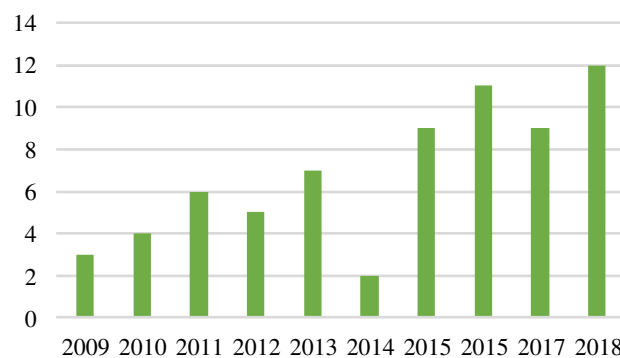


Figure 1. Distribution of texts per year (own elaboration)

Researchers assessed the quality and relevance of the papers using a four-point Likert scale: they graded papers from 1 to 4 (1 = the paper addresses either the concept of digital

competence or media competence from a general perspective; 2 = the paper addresses either the concept of digital competence or media competence in relation to teacher training; 3 = the paper addresses either the concept of digital competence or media competence in relation to EFL/ESL teaching/learning; 4 = the paper addresses either the concept of digital competence or media competence in relation to EFL/ESL teacher training) to determine whether the documents should be used in the study. Papers with a minimum mean score of 3 were selected for the study (except for those which had received a score of 1 by at least one of the researchers, which were directly excluded).

Microsoft Excel software was used for analysing information of the selected studies and content analysis technique (Bardin, 2013) was applied in order to categorise the selected papers and facilitate drawing conclusions: data was reduced by means of coding and thematic organization according to six areas of interest: (i) analysis of digital competence from a general perspective; (ii) analysis of media competence from a general perspective; (iii) analysis of digital competence in relation to EFL/ESL teaching/learning; (iv) analysis of media competence in relation to EFL/ESL teaching/learning; (v) analysis of digital competence in relation to EFL/ESL teacher training; and (vi) analysis of media competence in relation to EFL/ESL teacher training. Then, a descriptive analysis of each paper was carried out.

### **3.4. Results**

To clarify the results obtained, this section is organised in two sub-sections: definition of the competences and presence of the competences within EFL/ESL teachers' training curricula.

#### **3.4.1. Teachers' competences for 21<sup>st</sup> century**

##### *1. Digital Competence*

The concept of “digital competence”, also known as “digital literacy” (Ala-Mutka, 2011; Pérez & Delgado, 2012; Sefton-Green, Nixon & Erstad, 2009) or “computer literacy” (Tafazoli, Gómez & Huertas, 2017), has been deeply addressed in research on education, with manifold experts, international bodies and institutions supplying definitions and approaches (CRUE-TIC & REBIUN, 2009; Fraser, Atkins & Richard, 2013; Gutiérrez, Prendes & Castañeda, 2015; ISTE, 2017; Janssen, Stoyanov, Ferrari, Punie, Pannekeet & Sloep, 2013; OECD, 2011; Suárez, Almerich, Gargallo & Aliaga, 2013). In this context, Hepp, Prats & Holgado (2015, p. 38) give an understandable clarification of what it is: the sum of knowledge and strategies that helps an individual to solve problems associated with the digital world by using digital support.

The European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning defines this competence as follows:

Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technologies (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet (European Parliament and the Council, 2006, p. 6).

In other words, this competence allows individuals to properly use digital and technological resources available online and, in general, to face the challenges ICTs pose to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century society.

In the case of teachers, Claro, Salinas, Cabello-Hutt, San Martín, Preiss, Valenzuela & Jara (2018, p. 164) go beyond this definition by saying that teachers' digital competence includes "the information and communication skills and knowledge that teachers should have to perform their professional work (e.g., plan and prepare lessons) in a digital environment".

Ferrari (2013, p. 11) in the DigComp 1.0, Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero & Van den Brande (2016, pp. 8-9) in the DigComp 2.0, and Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie (2017, p. 21) in the DigComp 2.1 claim that digital competence can be categorized into five areas: i) information and data literacy; ii) communication and collaboration; iii) digital content creation; iv) personal safety; and v) problem-solving.

According to the Common Digital Competence Framework for Teachers (INTEF, 2017), the first area alludes to the ability to select, organize and analyse digital information as well as to assess its relevance according to the purpose why it has been selected. This scope combines three main capabilities: i) browsing, searching and filtering digital content (i.e. using different information sources and searching strategies to find relevant data); ii) evaluating it (i.e. assessing data critically); and iii) managing it (i.e. organizing data for future use). Communication and collaboration relates to sharing resources through online platforms and participating in online communities and networks. It includes: i) interacting, sharing and collaborating using digital technologies (i.e. devices, applications and platforms) appropriately; ii) engaging in citizenship using them (i.e. searching for new opportunities to empower oneself and for citizen participation); and iii) internet conventions of politeness (i.e. awareness of diversities of all types and consciousness of the rules for virtual and online participation). Digital content creation refers to the design of new content and the re-elaboration of previous knowledge to make new artistic and multimedia productions (i.e. creation of online digital teaching resources such as interactive activities, websites and/or virtual classrooms). Teachers

also need to develop personal safety, which is concerned with protecting personal information and data when using digital and online resources. It includes: i) protection of devices and content (i.e. being able to understand and identify exposure to online dangers and solutions for possible problems); ii) protection of privacy and health; and iii) protection of the environment (i.e. considering the possible side effects of technology in the physical world). Finally, problem-solving implies identifying needs in the creative use of technology and making decisions when technical problems arise.

## *2. Media Competence*

Bearing in mind that not only technology but also social media are becoming more and more important in every sphere of our globalized world, digital competence seems to be insufficient for teachers (in general) and English teachers (in particular) to cope with the challenges of the present. Besides this, technology has profoundly changed in relation to the way we produce, transmit and receive information; such renovations require changes in education in order not to be isolated from reality (Aguaded-Gómez, 2012; Masanet, Contreras & Ferrés, 2013; Ramírez-García & González-Fernández, 2016; Sandoval-Vizueté, Calvopiña-Osorio & Cevallos-Viscaíno, 2018).

These changes require new technical and interpretation skills for creating and accessing knowledge, as well as expertise in new symbol systems. The integration of texts, sounds and images in multimedia documents, along with interactivity, make this a special language that forces us to consider now a «multimedia», «digital» or «media» alphabet, which might be a prerequisite nowadays, but will become unavoidable in the near future (Gutiérrez, 2010, p. 172).

As Gutiérrez (2010) pinpoints, digital competence is not enough considering the number of requests the current reality demands of 21<sup>st</sup>-century teachers. Media competence, also known as “media literacy” (Ala-Mutka, 2011; Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012; Masanet, Contreras & Ferrés, 2013; Nogueira-Frazão & Martínez-Solana, 2018; Pérez & Delgado, 2012; Scolari, Masanet, Guerrero-Pico & Establés, 2018; Verbitskaya & Ivanova, 2011) goes far beyond digital competence; and it can be defined as an interrelated and complex set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allows efficiently to face the media environment of today by adapting to constant changes and different contexts (Velasco, 2016), which is considerably becoming more and more relevant (Marta-Lazo, 2018; Pérez & Delgado, 2018; Ramírez, Renés & González, 2018).

Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012) consider media competence as a combination of six dimensions organized into two big fields: analysis and expression. These six dimensions are: language, technologies, processes of interaction, production and diffusion, beliefs and values,

and aesthetics; all of them must be accounted for in the ongoing world. On their part, Verbitskaya & Ivanova state that “at present time media competence is becoming one of the most important qualities of modern teacher’s personality and its formation is one of the urgent problems of general pedagogics” (2011, p. 1652).

Some differences have been historically established between media and digital competences. According to Pérez & Delgado (2012, p. 27), the former focuses “on the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the mass media and audiovisual language”, while the latter connects with “searching abilities, processing, communication and information dissemination with technologies”. However, a distinction between these two cannot be made as both are intrinsically linked to teachers’ information literacy (i.e. capability of knowing when information is required, and having the ability to identify, assess, and work with it in order to solve a problem (Álvarez & Gisbert, 2015).

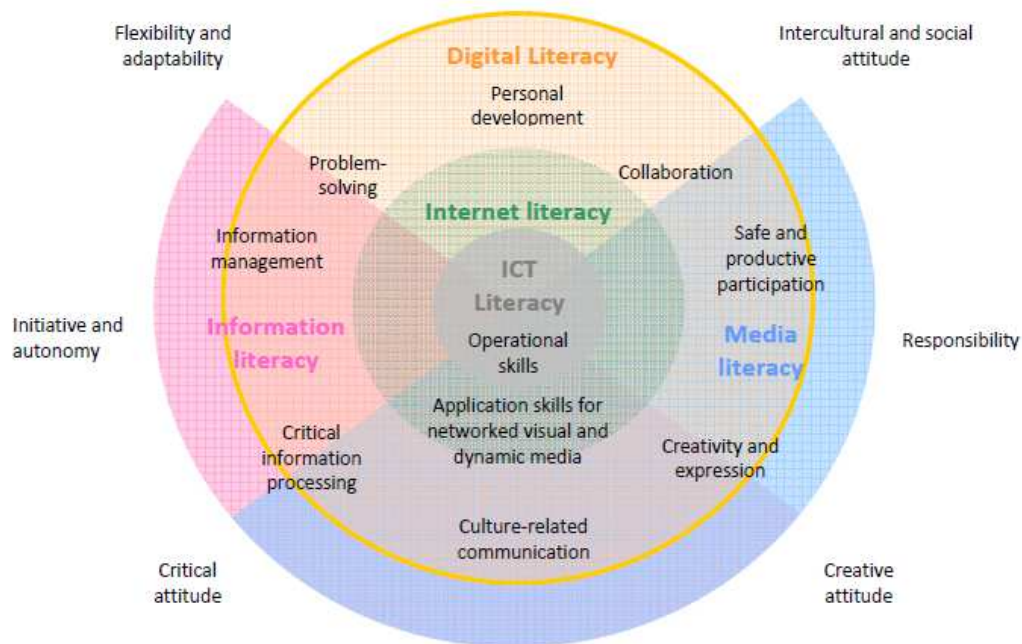


Figure 2. Digital competence, media competence and information literacy (Ala-Mutka, 2011, p. 44)

### 3.4.2 Digital and Media Competences within ESL/EFL teachers’ training curricula

The use of technology brings quality to the classroom and, in this sense, the literature on the relevance of digital and media competences in teacher training and practice is profuse (Fernández-Cruz & Fernández-Díaz, 2016; Pérez-Escoda, Castro-Zubizarreta & Fandos-Igado, 2016; Pérez-Mateo, Romero & Romeu-Fontanillas, 2014; Romero-Martín, Castejón-Oliva,



López-Pastor & Fraile-Aranda, 2017). Similarly, ICTs also have a positive effect on the English classroom. According to Fritz (2016), integrating technology into the teaching of a foreign language implies adopting a constructionist paradigm where the student is the centre of the learning process. In this sense, in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century English classroom, ESL/EFL teachers must put their digital and media competences into practice, so that it can happen.

For the last fifty years, technology has been present in language classrooms with the use of listening exercises, films, recordings, labs, etc. However, along the years, a technological revolution has started in the language teaching field, which is proved by the huge amount of publications on the area: Carrió, 2016; Gargiulo, Gargiulo & Fernández, 2016; Hampel & Stickler, 2015; Martín-Monje, Elorza & García, 2016; Tafazoli, Gómez & Huertas, 2018. Unfortunately, ICTs are internationally used in teacher education in a superficial way (Røkenes & Krumsvik, 2016) despite the importance given by international bodies. In fact, many in-training teachers inform they feel unprepared for teaching with ICTs and report that innovative ICT approaches are not promoted in teacher training as they really should (Sang, Valcke, Braak & Tondeur, 2010).

For many years, teacher training faculties have made efforts preparing pre-service teachers to integrate ICTs into their future teaching practices. To do so, courses to enhance teacher's digital and media competences courses have been added to university curricula, and computer availability and support for classroom use have also increased in this setting (Ferrari, 2012; Voogt, Erstad, Dede & Mishra, 2013).

ICTs are integrated into teachers' initial training curricula only in specific areas which are not cross-disciplinary; besides, teachers' digital and media competences are present as specific objectives in few syllabuses and they are reduced into cursory activities such as learning how to use a computer. As a consequence, pre-service teachers are generally not prepared to integrate the fostering of digital/media competence in their teaching even when they graduate. Definitely, the problem for in-training teachers does not consist in learning how to use ICTs but in how to integrate them into their future teaching careers (Brun & Hinostroza, 2011).

Looking at the constant changes of technologies and how they can be applied in the classroom, teacher education needs to reflect on what is understood by digital and media competences, how they are addressed in syllabuses and, ultimately, reformulate the way they are treated.

#### **4. Discussion and conclusion**

The changing tendency of the current social, economic and educational context due to technological advances is undoubtable. In this setting, new knowledge is being created and, as a consequence, modern training methods are required of teachers to help students develop necessary competences for 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The usefulness of technologies in the classroom is unquestionable nowadays. There are many resources available for teachers (videos, MOOCs, gaming tools, wikis, edublogs, WebQuests, podcasts, online games, social media) and their advantages for learning languages are well-known due to the communicative nature of the subject. However, students will not get the most out of these if teachers are not able to integrate them in a proper way.

Much has been written on the power and possibilities of ICTs and e-learning for teacher training and learning in general. In fact, it has been proven that both have become a reality in every field of education (even in ESL/EFL learning and teaching). However, universities and teacher-training centres should provide in-training teachers with plenty of information about these in order to become fully digitally competent so that they are able to train 21<sup>st</sup>-century students in how to use technology in a safe way. To do so, a series of considerations should be taken into account:

1. Inclusion of media competence in syllabuses is essential as 21<sup>st</sup>-century society requires a more comprehensive perspective to face the challenges of the media environment.
2. A simplification of the concepts of teachers' digital and media competences is needed as it seems difficult to arrive at a simple and contextualized clarification of what teachers should acquire with such ambiguous definitions.
3. An efficient model for teachers' digital and media competences development is required. In this sense, Põldoja, Väljataga, Tammets & Laanpere (2011) offer a model which consists of five areas: i) prepare and inspire students in a digital environment; ii) design and develop learning experiences and a learning environment; iii) model and design work environments; iv) promote and model digital democracy and accountability; and v) participate in professional development. These five dimensions are closely related to digital competence areas as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Model for teachers' digital/media competences development and digital competence areas (own elaboration)

<b>Areas of digital competence</b>	<b>Põldoja, Väljataga, Tammets &amp; Laanpere's model</b>
Area 1: information and data literacy	Promote and model digital democracy and accountability
Area 2: communication and collaboration	Model and design work environments
Area 3: digital content creation	Design and develop learning experiences and a learning environment
Area 4: personal safety	Prepare and inspire students in a digital environment
Area 5: problem-solving	Participate in professional development

4. A periodical evaluation of teacher-training centres is essential in order to diagnose the ICT culture prevailing at them, as well as the infrastructure and services provided.
5. A development of awareness during initial teacher training is also necessary.

These ideas need to be translated into practical actions. ESL/EFL instructors must develop their ability to use digital resources effectively if they want to promote students' learning and their own professional development as teachers. Consequently, they need to reflect about the different technological resources they can use and how to get the most out of them, as well as to integrate them in their teaching practice so that language use and proficiency are promoted in the classroom (Botella & Galindo, 2017; Instituto Cervantes, 2012).

Proficiency in the target language is not the only requirement for ESL/EFL teachers, since acquiring teaching skills to help their students develop their own competences is also necessary (Murray & Christison, 2010; Christison & Murray, 2010; Christison & Murray, 2014). For this reason, universities should take into account how using ICTs in general and the Internet in particular may help pre-service and in-service teachers in their work. Among all the possibilities, social networks are possibly the most beneficial tool due to their social power and their potential for the creation of relationships as teachers' collaboration is key to a good teaching practice (Nelson, 2009; Van Houten, 2015). In this sense, universities should consider including social networks in their curricula and syllabuses so that pre-service ESL/EFL teachers (and teachers in general) could have a clear idea of their potential for building and sharing knowledge and so they could share knowledge and experiences (Hershkovitz & Forkosh-Baruch, 2017; Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017).

Definitely, training centres must provide ESL/EFL teachers with ample instruction to develop their digital and media competences, so that they can promote active use of languages

among students, motivate them towards learning, and help them become fully-prepared citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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