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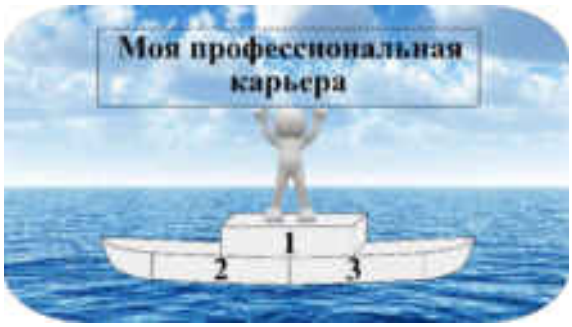
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Шихбердиев Шихберди, Хуммедов Мекан, Везирова Гульджемиле, Аманова Энеджан ВСТРЕЧА ГЛАВ ГОСУДАРСТВ СНГ И ПРИКАСПИЙСКИХ СТРАН В АВАЗЕ: НОВЫЙ ЭТАП ТРАНСПОРТНО-ЛОГИСТИЧЕСКОГО И ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА	574
Аннамаммедов Сейран, Байрамгельдиев Халдурды, Баллыев Мукам РОЛЬ КОМПЬЮТЕРА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ И ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ ПОДГОТОВКЕ СПЕЦИАЛИСТОВ	579
Abdlnebiýeva Bayramgul Nurmyradovna THE IMPORTANCE OF USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND MODERN TEACHING METHODS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING	592
Esenova Mayya Rejepmuhammedovna DIGITAL LITERACY AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION	601
Bashimova Guncha Ishanovna CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION	610
Jumagylyjova Hatija Jepbarovna THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND MODERN TEACHING METHODS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING	620
Rahimova Jemal Deryayevna THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION	629
Dovletmuradova Mahri Annamuradovna INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS	641
Гурбанов М. ИННОВАЦИИ В ОБЛАСТИ ХИМИЧЕСКОЙ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ И ИХ ПРОМЫШЛЕННОЕ ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ	650
Новрузова Арзыгуль Ахмедовна КАК МАРКЕТИНГ ВЛИЯЕТ НА КАЧЕСТВО СПРОСА ПРОДУКТА У ПОТРЕБИТЕЛЯ	655
Хуммаева Огулкейик СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ ПРИОРИТЕТЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКОГО СЕКТОРА	660

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Название публикации: «DIGITAL LITERACY AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION»

Abstract

The increasing influence of digital technologies on education has transformed the ways in which foreign languages are taught and learned. In contemporary educational environments, language proficiency alone is insufficient for successful participation in academic, professional, and intercultural communication. Learners must also be able to search for information, evaluate digital content, communicate appropriately in online environments, create digital materials, and use technological tools responsibly. These abilities constitute digital literacy, which has become an essential component of modern foreign language education. This article examines the concept of digital literacy and its significance for developing students' communicative competence, critical thinking, learner autonomy, and intercultural awareness. Particular attention is given to the integration of digital resources into language instruction, the responsible application of artificial intelligence, and the challenges faced by teachers and educational institutions. The article argues that digital literacy should be systematically integrated into foreign language curricula through purposeful learning activities, teacher professional development, and appropriate assessment practices. Developing these competencies can contribute to more effective, inclusive, and sustainable language education in the digital age.

Keywords: digital literacy, foreign language education, digital competence, English language teaching, critical thinking, information evaluation, artificial intelligence, online communication, learner autonomy.

Introduction. The development of digital technologies has significantly changed the educational environment and the ways in which people access, exchange, and produce information. University students increasingly use online platforms, electronic libraries, digital communication tools, and artificial intelligence applications to support

their academic activities. These developments have created new opportunities for foreign language learning while introducing additional requirements for learners and teachers.

Foreign language education traditionally focuses on the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. These competencies remain fundamental; however, contemporary learners must also understand how to communicate effectively in digital environments and how to evaluate the reliability of information obtained from online sources. The ability to read an English-language article, for example, is not sufficient if a learner cannot distinguish reliable information from misleading content or recognize the purpose and credibility of the website on which the article appears.

Digital literacy has therefore become closely connected with the objectives of modern language education. It enables learners to use technology not merely for accessing information but also for analyzing content, producing meaningful messages, cooperating with others, and developing independent learning strategies.

The importance of this issue is particularly evident in higher education, where students are expected to conduct research, prepare academic assignments, participate in international communication, and acquire professional knowledge through foreign-language resources. Digital competence supports these activities and contributes to students' readiness for lifelong learning.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of digital literacy in modern foreign language education, identify the main challenges associated with its development, and propose practical approaches for integrating digital literacy into language teaching.

Digital literacy can be understood as the ability to use digital technologies confidently, critically, safely, and responsibly to obtain information, communicate, create content, and solve problems. It involves more than technical knowledge because effective digital participation also requires judgement, ethical awareness, and an understanding of how information is produced and distributed.

The European Commission's DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens identifies five broad areas of digital competence: information and data

literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving [1]. These areas provide a useful framework for integrating digital literacy into foreign language education.

Information and data literacy involves locating, evaluating, and organizing information. In language learning, students may need to compare dictionary definitions, investigate unfamiliar concepts, analyses online articles, and identify reliable sources for presentations or written assignments.

Communication and collaboration concern the appropriate use of digital tools to interact with others. Students may participate in online discussions, work on shared documents, exchange feedback, or collaborate with international partners. Such activities require linguistic competence as well as an understanding of online communication conventions.

Digital content creation involves producing and modifying digital materials. Foreign language learners can prepare presentations, record podcasts, create short educational videos, design digital posters, or develop electronic portfolios. These activities encourage students to use the target language for authentic purposes.

Safety includes protecting personal information, respecting privacy, recognizing online risks, and maintaining responsible digital behavior. Students should understand how to use educational platforms appropriately and avoid sharing sensitive information with unauthorized services.

Problem-solving refers to the ability to select suitable digital tools, address technical difficulties, and adapt to new technological situations. In language education, students may need to identify an appropriate online resource, select an effective method of practicing pronunciation, or choose a suitable platform for completing a collaborative project.

These components demonstrate that digital literacy is a multidimensional competence. Its development should be integrated into educational activities rather than treated solely as a separate technical subject.

Digital literacy can be developed through carefully designed activities that combine language objectives with practical digital tasks. The following approaches are particularly suitable for higher education.

Evaluating online information is an important activity for developing both reading skills and digital competence. Students can be given two or three online texts addressing the same topic and asked to compare their content, authorship, publication dates, evidence, and intended audiences.

For example, learners studying English for economics can compare reports about changes in international trade. They should identify the original source of the information, distinguish statistical evidence from personal interpretation, and explain which text provides the most reliable support for a particular claim.

The activity develops reading comprehension, academic vocabulary, analytical thinking, and source evaluation simultaneously. It also teaches students that understanding a text involves examining not only its language but also its credibility and context.

Producing digital content provides students with opportunities to use English for meaningful communication. Instead of completing only traditional written exercises, learners can create presentations, podcasts, short videos, digital posters, or online information guides.

A group project might require students to prepare a digital presentation about sustainable development, cultural heritage, international education, or professional communication. Each participant can be responsible for researching information, preparing a section of the presentation, checking language accuracy, or delivering the final report. This approach integrates several language skills and encourages creativity, cooperation, and responsibility. Teachers should assess both the quality of the language and the accuracy of the information rather than focusing exclusively on visual design.

Digital platforms make it possible for students to communicate with learners from other educational institutions and countries. Virtual exchanges can involve interviews, joint presentations, collaborative research, and discussions of cultural similarities and differences. These activities help learners develop the language required for asking

questions, explaining unfamiliar concepts, expressing agreement or disagreement, and resolving misunderstandings. They also encourage awareness of cultural differences in communication styles and expectations. Teachers should establish clear guidelines for respectful interaction, equitable participation, and the protection of personal information. Students should also be encouraged to reflect on what they have learned from communicating with people whose experiences differ from their own.

A digital portfolio is a collection of a learner's work that demonstrates progress over time. It may contain written assignments, recordings, presentations, vocabulary lists, feedback, and personal reflections. In foreign language education, digital portfolios help students observe changes in their writing accuracy, speaking fluency, vocabulary range, and confidence. They also provide opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of different learning strategies. For instance, students can record a short presentation at the beginning of a semester and prepare another on a comparable topic several weeks later. By comparing the recordings, they can identify improvements in pronunciation, organization, and fluency. This approach encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their progress and provides teachers with additional evidence for formative assessment.

Artificial intelligence has introduced new possibilities for foreign language education. AI-powered tools can generate practice questions, explain grammatical structures, suggest alternative vocabulary, simulate conversations, and provide feedback on written texts. Nevertheless, the effective use of these applications depends on students' ability to assess their outputs critically. AI systems may produce inaccurate information, inappropriate examples, unnatural expressions, or fabricated references. Learners who accept such outputs without verification risk developing misunderstandings and weakening their independent language skills. UNESCO's guidance on generative AI in education and research emphasizes the importance of human-centered implementation, responsible use, and appropriate safeguards [2]. These principles are relevant to foreign language teaching because students need to understand both the capabilities and limitations of AI applications.

Teachers can integrate AI literacy into language lessons through structured activities. For example, students may ask an AI tool to explain a grammatical rule, compare its explanation with a recognized textbook, identify differences, and write their own explanation based on the evidence. Alternatively, learners can examine AI-generated translations and identify expressions that do not accurately reflect the original meaning. Such activities encourage students to treat AI as a resource for learning rather than an unquestionable authority. They also create opportunities to develop vocabulary, grammatical awareness, critical reading, and academic integrity.

Educational institutions should establish clear policies concerning acceptable AI assistance, acknowledgement of AI use, student privacy, and independent assessment. Students must understand that technological support should contribute to learning rather than replace the work required to develop genuine competence.

Despite its importance, the development of digital literacy in foreign language education faces several challenges. One challenge is unequal access to digital infrastructure. Students may have different levels of access to computers, smartphones, reliable internet connections, and educational applications. Activities that depend entirely on advanced technology can disadvantage learners who lack suitable resources.

Educational institutions should therefore prioritise accessible platforms, downloadable materials, and alternative ways of completing assignments. The choice of technology should reflect students' actual circumstances rather than assumptions about universal access.

Another challenge is the varying level of digital competence among teachers. Some educators may be confident in using educational applications but require additional preparation in evaluating online information, designing digital assessment, or teaching responsible AI use. Others may have strong pedagogical skills but limited experience with particular digital platforms. Continuous professional development can address these differences. Training should focus on practical classroom applications, the evaluation of learning outcomes, digital safety, and the relationship between technology and language-learning objectives.

Information overload is another concern. The large quantity of online materials can make it difficult for students to identify relevant and reliable information. Teachers should provide guidance on search strategies, source comparison, note-taking, and the organization of research materials.

Digital distraction and excessive dependence on technological tools may also reduce the effectiveness of learning. Notifications, unrelated websites, and the automatic completion of assignments can interfere with concentration. Clear classroom expectations and purposeful activity design can help students remain focused. Finally, digital literacy requires regular updating. Platforms, online risks, communication practices, and AI capabilities change over time. Educational institutions must therefore treat digital competence as an ongoing learning process rather than a skill acquired once and retained without further development.

The teacher plays a central role in ensuring that digital technologies contribute to meaningful language learning. Rather than simply introducing applications into lessons, educators need to design activities that combine linguistic objectives with critical and responsible technology use. Teachers should help students understand how to identify reliable information, communicate appropriately online, create original digital content, and evaluate automated feedback. They should also demonstrate how to acknowledge sources and respect intellectual property. Assessment practices can reinforce these objectives. In addition to evaluating the final assignment, teachers may ask students to explain their research process, identify the sources they used, justify their choice of information, and reflect on the contribution of digital tools to their work. Such assessment helps distinguish genuine understanding from the uncritical reproduction of information. It also encourages students to become more aware of their learning strategies.

Teacher collaboration is equally valuable. Educators can exchange lesson plans, discuss successful activities, develop shared digital resources, and evaluate new technologies together. Institutional support for this collaboration can contribute to more consistent and effective approaches to digital literacy. Ultimately, teachers should aim

to create an environment in which technology supports independent thought, meaningful communication, and responsible participation rather than encouraging passive consumption of digital content.

Provide regular professional development. Offer practical training that enables teachers to combine digital tools with communicative, collaborative, and task-based teaching methods. Promote critical evaluation of information. Encourage students to compare sources, verify claims, recognize bias, and use reliable evidence in academic assignments.

Assess digital and linguistic development together. Evaluate not only grammatical accuracy and vocabulary but also source reliability, communication quality, ethical conduct, and the ability to use digital resources independently. Encourage lifelong learning. Help students develop the confidence and strategies needed to adapt to new technologies and continue improving their language and digital competencies after graduation. The implementation of these recommendations can contribute to an educational environment in which digital literacy becomes an integral part of language proficiency and academic development.

Conclusion. Digital literacy has become an essential component of modern foreign language education because contemporary communication increasingly involves digital information, online interaction, and technology-supported learning. Students need more than the ability to understand and produce a foreign language; they must also be capable of evaluating information, communicating responsibly, creating digital content, and adapting to changing technological environments.

The integration of digital literacy into language instruction can support the development of communicative competence, critical thinking, learner autonomy, intercultural awareness, and professional readiness. Activities involving online source evaluation, digital content creation, virtual exchange, reflective portfolios, and responsible AI use provide practical opportunities to develop these abilities.

Nevertheless, successful implementation requires attention to unequal access, teacher preparation, information overload, digital safety, and academic integrity. These challenges cannot be addressed through technology alone. They require appropriate

institutional policies, effective pedagogical planning, continuous professional development, and meaningful teacher–student interaction.

The central argument of this article is that digital literacy should be treated as a fundamental educational competence rather than an optional technical skill. Its development should be embedded in the objectives, activities, and assessment practices of foreign language programmers.

By combining language instruction with critical, ethical, and purposeful engagement with digital resources, higher education institutions can prepare students to communicate effectively, participate responsibly in digital society, and continue learning throughout their professional lives.

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