

Pre-service Biology Teachers' Digital Competences Profile

Submitted 28 January 2024, Revised 16 February 2024, Accepted 17 February 2024

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Abstract

Education in the digital era increasingly demands teachers to have the ability to utilize technology as a tool in the learning process. Pre-service biology teachers need to understand and master various technologies related to the biology field, such as educational software, online learning platforms, and other digital media. This study aimed to objectively and comprehensively describe the profile of digital competence among biology pre-service teachers. This study utilizes a quantitative descriptive research design. The data collection uses a specially designed questionnaire to measure the digital competence of biology pre-service teachers. The research findings found that the average score of the average level of digital competency among pre-service biology teachers is 3.13, indicating a moderate level. The findings can be the basis for developing training programs and enhancing digital competence for pre-service biology teachers.

Keywords: Profile, Digital competences, Pre-service biology teachers

INTRODUCTION

Education in the digital era requires teachers to utilize technology as part of the learning process effectively. Technological advances have dramatically transformed how humans access information across disciplines, including biology (Dias-Trindade *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, biology pre-service teachers must understand and master various biology-related technologies, such as educational software, online learning platforms, and digital media. This means that future biology teachers must have adequate digital literacy.

Digital competence refers to an individual's ability to use digital technology to achieve specific goals effectively (Zhao *et al.*, 2021; Alnasib, 2023; Wang, 2023). It encompasses skills related to searching, acquiring, processing, and communicating information and transforming it into knowledge (Díaz-Burgos *et al.*, 2023). According to Montilla *et al.* (2023), Providing teachers with the essential digital skills to navigate the digital era is crucial. An exceptional biology pre-service teacher can incorporate technology into their lessons to create engaging and immersive learning experiences for their students. Digital competence is essential for improving learning effectiveness and efficiency (Stopar & Bartol, 2018) and preparing students for an increasingly advanced digital world (Redecker & Punie, 2017; Kassymova *et al.*, 2023). It is also integral to making distance learning more accessible and flexible for all students (Yang, 2020). Educators must implement engaging and effective learning by utilizing digital technology. Furthermore, educators must recognize digital technology's role in education and teach students how to use it responsibly and safely.

Previous research has emphasized the significance of digital competence in improving educational outcomes (Scheel *et al.*, 2022; Kassymova *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, studies have identified deficiencies in this area among pre-service teachers (Guillen-Gamez *et al.*, 2020; Sixto-García *et al.*, 2020). However, there is still a lack of understanding regarding biology pre-service teachers' precise digital competence profile and the factors contributing to their inadequacies. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the digital competence of pre-service biology teachers, focusing on their level of understanding, mastery, and utilization of technology for learning purposes. The study aims to inform the development of targeted training programs to improve the digital competence of pre-service biology teachers. This will enhance the quality of learning in today's digital environment. The identified aspects will be used to guide the development of these programs.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design to provide an objective and comprehensive description of the digital competence profile among pre-service biology teachers. The researcher will collect numerical data and conduct statistical analysis to offer a clear overview of students' digital competence. The study's population comprises all pre-service biology teachers at a public university in Tarakan, Indonesia. The researcher will employ a quota sampling technique to select a representative sample of pre-service biology teachers who have yet to begin their thesis and are from the cohorts of 2019-2021. The sample size will be 90 individuals, with each cohort comprising 30 individuals. Data will be collected using a specially designed questionnaire to measure the digital competence of pre-service biology teachers. The questionnaire will contain statements related to the investigated aspects of digital competence, rated on a Likert scale of 1-5. Respondents will receive the questionnaire through a Google Form. The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, such as mean and standard deviation, and interpreted according to the digital competence criteria table (Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria of Digital Competence

No	Score	Criteria
1	4,21 – 5,00	Very High
2	3,41 – 4,2	High
3	2,61 – 3,4	Moderate
4	1,81 – 2,6	Low
5	1,0 – 1,8	Very Low

(Sudjana, 2005)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Results of Digital Competence Analysis for Pre-service Biology Teachers

Digital Competence Aspect	Standard Deviation	Average Score	Criteria
Information and Data Literacy	0.60	3.22	Moderate
Communication and Collaboration	0.62	3.25	Moderate
Digital Content Creation	0.68	2.93	Moderate
Safety	0.61	3.26	Moderate
Problem-Solving	0.67	3.00	Moderate
Average		3.13	Moderate

Based on the findings presented in Table 2, it is evident that the pre-service biology teachers from a public university in Tarakan, Indonesia exhibit a moderate level of digital literacy, with an average score of 3.13. This indicates that while they possess adequate skills to utilize digital technology effectively for educational and daily purposes, they still need to reach the threshold of high proficiency in this domain. Recognizing the significance of digital competence in education, as reported by Cuhadar (2018), highlights the essential role of digital tools in the modern learning environment. Therefore, it becomes imperative for pre-service biology teachers to master educational software and integrate digital tools seamlessly into their teaching methodologies (Kassymova *et al.*, 2023). They play a key and central role in achieving and promoting the integration of ICT in professional practice and in developing guidelines for using ICT in educational spaces with the support of administrations and curricula (Romero-Tena *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, universities should consider enriching their curricula by incorporating courses that nurture digital competency among students (Reisoğlu & Çebi, 2020; Kordigel & Aberšek, 2022). This would deepen their understanding and broaden their skillset in leveraging digital technology for educational purposes.

This research examines five aspects of digital competence. Firstly, information and data literacy received an average score of 3.22, indicating moderate levels of competence. Information and data literacy encompasses essential skills such as effectively accessing, evaluating, and utilizing information (Shomedran, 2020; Arjaya *et al.*, 2023). It is crucial for biology educators to adeptly navigate through various information sources, discern their reliability, and employ them purposefully in educational contexts (Heuling *et al.*, 2021; Fibriana *et al.*, 2018). This enriches their subject knowledge, keeps them abreast of contemporary developments, and empowers their students to critically evaluate information (Cebi & Reisoglu, 2020; Pettersson, 2018).

Enhancing information and data literacy skills necessitates tailored learning approaches focusing on information processing techniques like search engine usage, source evaluation, and data analysis (Astini, 2019; Nahdi *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, organizing training sessions and workshops dedicated to information and data literacy can bolster students' proficiency in this domain (Kristyanto, 2020; Sobchenko & Vorozhbit-Horbatiuk, 2022). By improving their information and data literacy skills, pre-service biology teachers will be better equipped to provide their students with meaningful, well-informed, evidence-based learning experiences, fostering a conducive environment for holistic educational development.

The score for the Communication and Collaboration aspect is 3.25, which falls within the moderate range. This indicates a satisfactory yet improvable level of competency in using digital media for communication and collaboration in online environments (Dias-Trindade *et al.*, 2021; Mas'ud *et al.*, 2022). Several studies emphasize the crucial role of digital communication and collaboration skills in educational contexts (Elstad & Christophersen, 2017; Cabezas-González *et al.*, 2021). Effective communication is crucial for meaningful interaction among students, teachers, parents, and fellow educators (Galindo-Domínguez & Bezanilla, 2021). Communication can take various forms, including text, audio, or visual.

Furthermore, digital collaboration skills enable seamless cooperation within digitally connected learning environments, allowing students to engage in group projects, exchange resources, and ideas, and collectively construct knowledge (Perifanou *et al.*, 2021; From, 2017; Lindsay, 2019; Gopinathan *et al.*, 2022). Communication and collaboration skills can be improved through various methods, such as engaging in collaborative discussions on digital platforms or utilizing online forums (Hazar, 2018; Hendrix, 2022). Higher education institutions may also offer training sessions focusing on effective digital communication, including language proficiency and online etiquette (Snyder, 2016). Using collaborative tools and platforms such as Google Classroom and Google Meet, along with other online learning platforms, can significantly assist pre-service biology teachers in promoting effective communication and collaboration (Rosmalah *et al.*, 2021; Mas'ud *et al.*, 2022). Introducing students to these tools and strategies designed to facilitate communication and collaboration in the learning context is essential (Hatos *et al.*, 2022). By improving their communication and collaboration skills, pre-service biology teachers can become effective educators capable of engaging with their students and colleagues. This fosters an environment conducive to productive collaboration and enriched educational experiences for all involved parties.

The students have demonstrated moderate competence, as evidenced by the average score of 2.93 in the Digital Content Creation aspect. This level of competence is crucial for pre-

service biology teachers as it enables them to produce creative and relevant digital content using various platforms (Antón-Sancho *et al.*, 2021; Budai *et al.*, 2023). It is recommended by Umoren *et al.* (2020) that digital service providers offer digital content in forms that stimulate users' critical thinking. Using digital tools and technologies is essential for crafting engaging learning materials that promote active student participation (Paskevicius, 2021). To improve these abilities, students should become familiar with various creative software and platforms, such as Google Classroom, Adobe Flash, Unity 3D, and Canva, as well as technologies like Augmented Reality (Suyanto *et al.*, 2020; Oktavian & Aldya, 2020; Khaerudin *et al.*, 2021; Analicia & Yogica, 2021; Nirwanto *et al.*, 2021). Learning to use these tools and understanding instructional design principles is essential to creating visually appealing and informative content (Rahman, 2018). Proficiency in practical design principles, such as clear layout, engaging visual elements, and structured content arrangement, plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of digital content (Abrori *et al.*, 2016). Students must also learn how to manage digital content to gain a comprehensive understanding of this context. This includes decoding and consciously using the thousands of images they encounter daily (Treglia & Tomassoni, 2019). It empowers students to become innovative teachers who can create engaging learning materials.

Similarly, digital safety, the fourth aspect of digital competence, earned an average score of 3.26, placing it in the moderate range. This represents the highest average score among all four aspects. These findings are consistent with Napal *et al.*'s (2018) discovery that prospective teacher students demonstrate more proficiency in digital safety issues. Pre-service biology teachers must understand the importance of safeguarding privacy and data security when utilizing digital technologies (Torres-Hernández & Gallego-Arrufat, 2022). Teachers must comprehend privacy protection, implement data security measures, and take necessary safety precautions, given the prevalent use of digital devices in education (Niyu & Purba, 2021). Basic digital security principles, such as using strong passwords and being cautious when disclosing personal information, are essential to improving security (Natamulia, 2022). In addition, addressing security threats such as phishing is crucial (Sari & Sutabri, 2023).

Moreover, according to Baeva (2021) and Ardiansyah *et al.* (2021), teachers and students must be engaged in discussions and activities addressing relevant digital safety issues within the educational context. This can include discussions about protecting students' data, ethics in technology usage, and actions to take when facing undesired security situations (Manik, 2022). Furthermore, students need to have strong digital literacy to verify the reliability of the information they use (Ni'mah, 2021) and recognize online manipulation or fraud attempts

(Qutni & Oesman, 2022). With a strong understanding of digital safety, students can protect themselves and their students from potential risks and threats in the digital environment. Universities and educational institutions must also ensure good security policies and practices (Hasututiningsih *et al.*, 2021). Silalahi *et al.* (2022) further explained that universities could adopt data security policies, involve staff and students in digital security training, and develop comprehensive privacy policies. Learning safety and security can be achieved by designing intelligent, personalized systems and services that enhance human-technology interaction by adapting students' activities to their cognitive state in digital education (Burov *et al.*, 2021).

Problem Solving, evaluated with an average score of 3.00 and categorized as moderate, is a critical aspect of digital competence. This assessment measures students' proficiency in recognizing, analyzing, and resolving complex issues using digital technology (Ferrari, 2013). The ability to employ digital technologies in problem-solving is indispensable for pre-service biology teachers. They play a pivotal role in imparting critical thinking skills, systematic problem analysis, and applying appropriate technological solutions to address challenges (Rosida *et al.*, 2019; Fatimah, 2019). Incorporating digital technology into learning contexts further enhances problem-solving activities. Students can familiarize themselves with software or applications that offer efficient or innovative solutions to problems (OECD, 2016; Hazar, 2018). For instance, modeling software, simulations, or data analysis tools tailored to biology can provide students with practical experiences in addressing complex issues while deepening their understanding of subjects of the subject (Ferrari, 2013). By integrating digital tools into problem-solving tasks, pre-service biology teachers equip themselves with essential skills and prepare their future students for the challenges of the digital age. They foster an environment where students can explore, experiment, and innovate, thereby nurturing a generation of learners adept at leveraging technology to overcome obstacles and drive progress.

The data indicates that pre-service biology teachers at a public university in Tarakan, Indonesia possess moderate digital competence. While some aspects require improvement, such as digital content creation and problem-solving, the overall average score suggests that the students have achieved satisfactory digital competence. Citations that provide insight into digital competence aspects are necessary to understand why developing this area in pre-service biology teachers is imperative. Çebi & Reisoğlu (2020) stated that strengthening students' digital competencies will equip them to adapt quickly to technological advances within education. Systematic training should help pre-service teachers develop digital pedagogical competency (Howard *et al.*, 2021; Bentri *et al.*, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The research findings found that the average score of digital competence among pre-service biology teachers at a public university in Tarakan, Indonesia is 3.13, indicating a moderate level. This conclusion provides a comprehensive understanding of the level of digital competence among pre-service biology teachers. It guides the development of better teaching programs to prepare them as effective educators in the digital era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank the Research and Community Service Institute of Universitas Borneo Tarakan for supporting research funding through the 2023 budget allocation. This support has contributed significantly to the successful implementation of the research until the publication stage. The author acknowledges the important role of the Research and Community Service Institute of Universitas Borneo Tarakan in supporting research development and knowledge advancement in this field.

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