



Teachers' digital competence for ICT skills in the 21st century: an assessment of their development

Aptitud digital del profesorado frente a las competencias TIC en el siglo XXI: una evaluación de su desarrollo

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the role of the teacher in education and its relationship with technological, information, and communication competencies is the subject of much attention in educational contexts. Thus, the objective of this study was to describe the results of concurrent mixed research, which evaluated the digital aptitude of teachers concerning ICT skills from a theoretical perspective established by UNESCO and the MEN. Therefore, the study was conducted with the participation of teachers of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of the University of La Guajira, Colombia, to know how they assumed their professional development concerning the technological competencies of the XXI century. The study identifies a very moderate use of active strategies and didactics supported by ICT. Likewise, limitations are found in the classrooms regarding technological infrastructure and connectivity, which hinder the integration of ICTs in the academic and student environment.

Keywords: digital aptitude, digital literacy, ICT skills, pedagogical strategies

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RESUMEN

Actualmente, el papel del docente en la educación y su relación con las competencias tecnológicas, de información y comunicación, acapara un gran número de miradas en los contextos educativos. De esta forma, el objetivo de este estudio fue describir los resultados devenidos de una investigación mixta concurrente, que evaluó la aptitud digital del docente frente a las competencias de las TIC, desde una perspectiva teórica establecida por la UNESCO y el MEN. Por lo que, el estudio se realizó con la participación de los docentes de la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Administrativas de la Universidad de La Guajira, Colombia, con la pretensión de conocer cómo estos asumían su desarrollo profesional frente a las competencias tecnológicas del siglo XXI. El estudio evidencia la identificación de un uso muy moderado de estrategias y didácticas activas apoyadas mediante las TIC. Asimismo, se encuentran limitaciones en las aulas en lo relacionado con la infraestructura tecnológica y la conectividad, elementos que obstaculizan la integración de las TIC en el ámbito académico y estudiantil.

Palabras clave: aptitud digital, alfabetización digital, competencias TIC, estrategias pedagógicas

Clasificación JEL: D24; O14.

INTRODUCTION

In disciplinary and academic debates in general, interest has been shown in how advances related to information and communication technologies (ICTs) have generated and continue to generate changes in all sectors and social spheres (Cerdá et al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2022). Likewise, the ways of relating and interacting with other human beings have been transformed, regardless of location, time, mode, or place, a fact that is revealed in supranational frameworks



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for educational policies (Falloon, 2020; McGarr et al., 2021). Consequently, communities have been acquiring new social structures, forming interculturality enhanced by the interconnectivity enabled by this virtual world (Cattaneo et al., 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic, its consequences, and the efforts to stabilize the construction of new normality highlighted the relevance of ICTs, mainly in the digitalization-virtualization processes (Chen et al., 2020; Quispe et al., 2021; Scull et al., 2020). Thus, using blended learning models in the Latin American context represented a challenge and offered a space for reflection for the future (Antón et al., 2021a). Developing digital competencies is an urgent process for teachers (Inamorato et al., 2023; Monzón et al., 2023; Pozo et al., 2020). Thus, expanding the capacity for the appropriate exploitation of technologies, virtual environments, and resources not only contributes to better individual performance (Amhag et al., 2019) but also fosters dialogue with emerging generations and facilitates addressing their digital nativity (Inamorato et al., 2023).

Therefore, digital competence in teaching (DTC) is conceived as a complex configuration of knowledge, skills, and fundamental attitudes in the effective use of technology (Heine et al., 2023). This implies assuming pedagogical and didactic criteria for the correct design of technological, informational, communicative, collaborative, and ethical aspects (Gómez et al., 2022; Guillén et al., 2021), which allows for improving the teaching-learning dynamics, leaving behind the restrictions of traditional models, giving way to structures that captivate learners.

In this way, education is impacted by these technological advances, and new educational software with or without open source code, helpful to support educational processes, frequently appears. These new tools adopted in teaching and learning pose significant challenges for teachers, students, and educational institutions (IE), supported by research and innovation processes (Fernández et al., 2022; Garzón et al., 2020). Therefore, teacher professionalization must address these challenges to educate with quality, relevance, and inclusiveness (Edstrand & Sjöberg, 2023).

At the global level, the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has formulated one of the central policies and guidelines in favor of ICT integration, where access and inclusion goals are described (Espejo et al., 2022). Similarly, the Colombian Ministry of National Education (MEN) has proposed ICT competencies for the professional development of teachers in the 21st century related to technological, communicative, pedagogical, managerial, and research competencies, all to train exploratory, integrative, and innovative teachers. Hence, higher education must transcend to renewed models in teaching (Ariza, 2021).

In this context, the University of La Guajira has invested resources in infrastructure to improve connectivity and currently has computer rooms with Internet connection. Likewise, it has developed training and updating programs for teachers in appropriating and using ICT. However, no change in the classroom impacts educational quality, which remains the same since there are very few research and educational projects that promote innovations in teaching practice.

One of the palpable results of this current state was revealed in the state tests, which show La Guajira in the last place on the Caribbean Coast in the past five years (Ariza, 2021). With indicators in generic competencies below the national average and consistent with these results, the University ranked below in the programs, both in generic and specific competencies. For the following periods, significant changes still need to be foreseen.

Other studies in Colombia show a high teacher appreciation for virtual environments but a low level of digital competence (Antón et al., 2022). Thus, at the international level, different influential factors in teaching competence are revealed, mainly in those sectors related to gender, age group, and openness to learning new resources and tools (Lucas et al., 2021). This situation is evident in students' performance and the results involving critical reading, written communication, and quantitative reasoning. Therefore, their performance is deficient in activities requiring higher-order competencies such as analysis, interpretation, and reflection.

Due to the above, knowing how teachers value their digital skills and the competencies required in this century is necessary. In this direction, it is recognized that EIs and the main agents (teachers and students) are generators of culture, which is produced and reproduced in the new educational environments supported by ICTs (González et al., 2021; Rodríguez, 2022). Therefore, revealing the positions of the strategic actors will make it possible to generate effective interventions to make up for the deficiencies.

In this sense, the study delves into the theories of learning in the computerized era and their application to teaching performance. At the same time, it seeks to update modern and contemporary concepts on pedagogy and

didactics, as well as the necessary ICT competencies by active methodologies applied and framed in the constructivist pedagogical model to which the educational project of the institution refers. In addition, it aims to describe the results of concurrent mixed research, which evaluated teachers' digital skills regarding ICT competencies in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of the University of La Guajira, Colombia.

METHODS

The study occurred in the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FACEYA) of the University of La Guajira, Colombia; the population consisted of 91 teachers assigned to that Faculty. Its implementation arose from the need to evaluate the digital aptitude of teachers, understood from an ICT training approach, in the technological conditions and educational policies that would allow the integration of their use and application in the curriculum, inside and outside the classroom.

The research was developed using a mixed approach, presenting a general concurrent design that allowed for simultaneous data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Thus, the scope of the quantitative research was descriptive, non-experimental, and cross-sectional, which allowed the assessment of teachers' digital aptitude.

On the other hand, the qualitative study had a naturalistic approach. A phenomenological design was used to characterize the pedagogical strategies that supported ICT and their impact on the university classroom from the teachers' representation. It should be noted that this type of study is characterized by exploring the representation of a phenomenon by the subjects themselves, based on the study of their beliefs, attitudes, and ways of understanding it (Cuthbertson et al., 2020; Larkin et al., 2019; Purwaningrum et al., 2019).

The sample was drawn from the census of 91 FACEYA teachers who were administered a survey with structured questions in a Likert-type questionnaire 1-5, subjected to statistical analysis. In both the qualitative and quantitative studies, the sample design corresponded to 10 participants for each typology (20 total), comprised as individual units of analysis, in acceptance of the sample sizes recommended for these studies (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). A recorded unstructured interview was applied in the form of open-ended questions to collect the data. In turn, the general concurrent mixed design contemplated two quantitative and qualitative phases, i.e., information was collected, and the results of each phase were analyzed and interpreted in parallel. The final purpose was to understand the phenomenon through the triangulation of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital literacy is understood from an ICT training approach in the technological conditions and educational policies that allow integration of its use and application in the curriculum, both outside and inside the classroom. UNESCO, in terms of sustainable education, has raised the importance of capacity, preparation, and willingness to benefit from the use of available technological tools about the conditions of electricity, connectivity, and adequate infrastructure, as well as teacher training and integration of ICT into the curriculum and the educational project of the IEs (Antón et al., 2021b; Bolmsten & Manuel, 2020; Agasisti et al., 2023).

Table 1
Moments and levels of competence

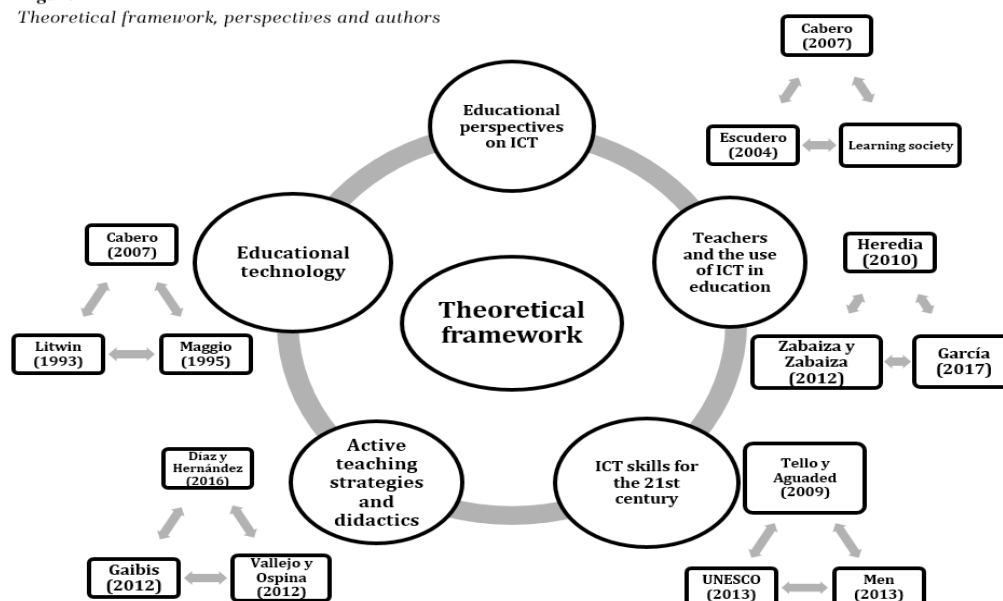
| Teaching/ Competency | Technological | Pedagogical | Communicative | Research |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Explorer | Knows the available technological tools and is able to introduce them in his/her professional practice. | Design strategies and methodological alternatives supported by ICTs. | Adequately exploits the possibilities offered by ICT to establish educational communication. | Uses ICT as a support for the recording and processing of the processes in which it participates. |

| | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|--|
| Integrator | It handles different technological tools according to the characteristics of the processes, its area of expertise and the implementation context. | Coordinates project-based experiences that promote learning through ICT. | Promotes collaborative work in virtual environments and the formation of groups, participation in networks and community building, supported by ICT. | Designs personal research projects and promotes student participation. |
| Innovative | Uses ICT knowledge for the creation and maintenance of learning environments, educational innovation and context transformation. | Exercise their educational leadership in virtual environments and adopt a inclusive and personalized approach to attend to the needs of the students. | He is an active member of virtual communities, research teams and socialization of the results of experiences in the integration of ICT to educational processes. | Promotes the generation of knowledge about ICT and its proper use. |

Note: Prepared by the authors based on Hernández et al. (2016).

The comparison of the reality studied and the theoretical review allowed us to base, reference, and orient the approach to stand the subject of the study. This facilitated the deepening and rigorous analysis of the results, giving meaning and scientific background to the data. Figure 1 below shows a synthesis of the results of the procedures.

Figure 1
Theoretical framework, perspectives and authors



Note: Own elaboration

By virtue of what was analyzed in each axis, the most relevant results for understanding the research process were presented, as can be seen in table 2.

Table 2.
Analysis and interpretation of quantitative data

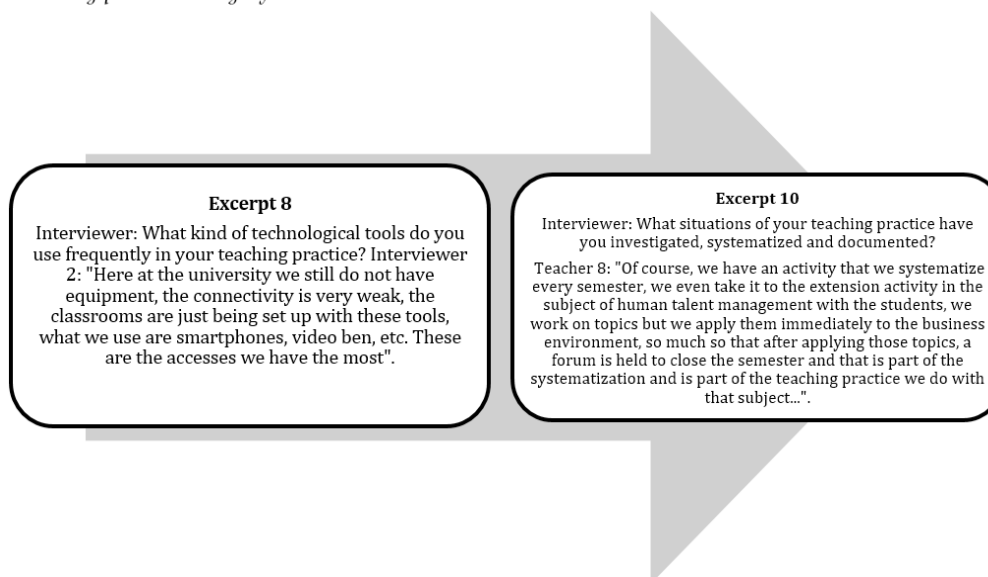
| Analysis and interpretation of quantitative data | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|-------|--|
| Conditions of access to the technological infrastructure of the IE | S | | CS | | AV | | CN | | N | | Media | |
| I have access to technical resources to support training in and out of the classroom. | 26 | 29 | 37 | 30 | 23 | 25 | 12 | 13 | 3 | 3 | 20.0 | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|------|
| I have adequate access to broadband connectivity in and out of the classroom to support my practice. | 16 | 18 | 17 | 19 | 25 | 28 | 19 | 21 | 14 | 15 | 20.2 |
| Computer classrooms to support teaching, have well-maintained computers with connectivity, capacity per student (1/1) and adequate educational platforms. | 8 | 9 | 19 | 21 | 28 | 31 | 20 | 22 | 16 | 17 | 20.0 |
| I have sufficient access and permissions to use the institution's virtual platforms, institutional repositories and databases. | 23 | 35 | 22 | 24 | 22 | 24 | 17 | 19 | 7 | 8 | 20.0 |
| Total media | | | | | | | | | | | 20 |

Source: Own elaboration

The results shown in table 2, related to digital aptitude, inferred that, despite the efforts to increase the investment of technological resources to support the academy, it still takes some time to adapt and adapt classrooms. These conditions were not considered ideal for achieving a change towards a generalized digital culture and, therefore, did not favor the intensive use and appropriation of ICTs.

Figure 2
Teaching practice category



Note: Own elaboration

According to the narratives, the conclusion of the teaching practice category in figure 2 goes in the direction of defining institutional guidelines that lead to the training of teaching staff in digital competencies and educational research. On the other hand, it is necessary to consolidate the execution of their projections regarding technological equipment and connectivity to achieve an adequate adoption and use of ICT in their daily practice, regardless of area, subject, or specialty. Regarding the triangulation of results, Hernández and Mendoza (2018) have expressed that this attempts to corroborate results, as well as to carry out cross-validations between data from both approaches, where the qualitative approach allows taking advantage of the advantages of each method and reducing its weaknesses.

Triangulation

Coincidences in the perception of the literacy level of FACEYA teachers are evident in other studies conducted in similar contexts, where they are stated as adequate or high (Antón et al., 2021b). On average, most acknowledge having adequate training and show willingness and readiness to benefit from ICTs. When interpreting the extracts of the category significant appropriation of technologies, teachers express the importance and strength of digital environments. They will assume the changes according to the conditions for adequate pedagogical use. This suggests divergences between the actual state of digital competence and the teachers' perception of it, which suggests the need to review standards, educational policies, and teaching practices.

In this regard, comparing digital tools' capacity, knowledge, and disposition in the classroom does not let them be corroborated with these results. This is because the respondents demonstrate a very moderate use of strategies and didactics supported by ICT. These results were divergent in both studies of the mixed design since the questionnaire shows a low level of implementation according to the MEN indicators; thus, the qualitative study suggests a social representation that points to a high perception. In this sense, the interviewees reaffirm the use of these digital resources through active pedagogy, which leads to infer that they are teachers with high-level training and who support graduate programs, which implies these purposes, in line with the results found in the literature, mainly in the studies conducted by authors such as Antón et al. (2021a, 2021b, 2022).

As for divergence, this has been diagnosed in other studies, such as the one conducted by Okoye et al. (2023), who emphasize the lack or inadequacy of training, difficulties in infrastructure and availability of resources, access to the Internet and other digital platforms, as the main challenges for the teaching-learning process mediated by ICTs. This constitutes a critical barrier and is, to a large extent, an expression of the reproduction of analogical educational models. In the Latin American context, this difficulty has been evaluated in several studies, which suggests a double conditioning established by the economic and cultural difficulties of the region, as well as the inadequate perception of the importance of ICTs.

In this aspect, there are similarities between what the teachers narrated and what the respondents showed. Thus, the results of both studies coincide in that the limitations are found in classrooms, technological infrastructure, and connectivity, factors that hinder the integration of ICTs in the educational sense. In this sense, the current state is conceived as far from UNESCO's proposals on technological equipment in university classrooms and the prospects for immediate implementation in higher education.

In short, it is reiterated that, according to the ICT competencies approach defined by the MEN (2013), teachers are at a level of exploration or low complexity to assume digital appropriation. This implies accepting the difficulties of transcending the integration stage and the shortcomings in the training and performance of the innovative teacher of these processes in the classroom. This aspiration requires an institution-wide strategy incorporating technological, communication, pedagogical, management, and research dimensions to achieve digital transformation (Cerdá et al., 2021).

In turn, comparing data and information related to educational projects generated from classroom experiences allows for corroboration. It proves that teachers need an accurate perception of what it means to be competent in using ICTs. The main difficulties are researching their practices, using big data, documenting experiences, and proposing research projects (Antón et al., 2021a). Therefore, the importance of educational research and innovation to promote the changes required by EI is highlighted; however, efforts are still needed to promote the development of this topic (Burgos & Branch, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The irruption of ICTs in higher education is not a casual or temporary phenomenon; it manifests in a digital era redesigning traditional teaching paradigms. At the same time, technology offers powerful tools to transform education; more than just implementing these tools, they are needed to optimize educational processes. Instead, the synergy between technological capabilities and pedagogical methodologies can bring about significant change.

The role of the teacher in this scenario changes significantly. Beyond being a simple transmitter of knowledge, the teacher becomes a mediator and facilitator of learning, using technology to adapt and personalize education according to the needs of each student. Their ability to lead and guide this change is crucial for the integration of ICT to be truly effective and transformative.

However, as has been pointed out, there is evident reluctance and difficulties in developing Digital Teaching Competence (DTC). Although educators may be familiar with concepts of active pedagogy, they only sometimes manage to effectively translate these methodologies to the digital environment. This gap between theory and practice underscores the need to provide teachers with ongoing training and support in digital didactics to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by ICTs.

Finally, CDD should not be seen as an isolated or exclusive teacher skill but as an institutional competency. Effective ICT integration requires a shared vision, where the entire educational community -including teachers, students, administrators, and managers- work together to redefine and improve educational processes. In this sense,

it is essential to foster a culture of collaboration and continuous learning in which all actors actively participate in constructing and improving educational projects in the digital era.

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