

# Investigating the Adequacy of EFL Learners' L2 Digital Literacy Skills, Consistency of Self-Assessed Competence, and Actual Performance

Khalid Al Seghayer, Department of English Language and Literature, College of Languages and Translation, Al Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

## ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the adequacy of EFL learners' abilities in three major dimensions of digital literacy skills and whether self-assessments of competence were consistent with their actual performance. It also identified factors that affected learners' use of the selected digital literacy skills. To this end, 60 Saudi EFL learners (41 male and 19 female) responded to a five-part, cross-sectional questionnaire of 36 items categorized according to the three dimensions of digital literacy skills. They also engaged in 11 predetermined real-time Internet search tasks. The participants' on-screen online search activities were recorded and subjected to a search log analysis. Short, semi-structured post-search interviews were conducted to capture the participants' reflections on the search process. The data was analyzed with descriptive statistics and paired t-tests. The participants' success in searches was measured by the total number of tasks completed accurately. The results indicated that the participants were ill-equipped to efficiently handle the three key L2 digital literacy skills. Participants' low self-perceived ability to use them adequately was consistent with their actual poor online search performance. Further, the participants scored low in search accuracy, with the exception of search results interpretation skills and, to some extent, skills to evaluate a website's usefulness, and exhibited a wide range of areas for improvement and challenges in Web information search. The implications of the study and potential areas of future research are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Actual Performance, Adequacy, EFL Learners, L2 Digital Literacy Skills, Self-Assessed Competence

## INTRODUCTION

Today, digital formats are reshaping traditional notions of literacy, and second language (L2) digital literacy skills (DLSs) are necessary to optimize learning English as a foreign language (EFL). L2 DLSs include the ability to effectively search for and locate online information, and to evaluate, synthesize, and integrate that digital information. These skills are fundamental to L2 digital literacy and are prerequisites for EFL learners to learn EFL effectively in a digitally enhanced language-learning environment, given that digital resources are the current delivery model for most online

DOI: 10.4018/IJCALLT.2020040101

language learning. Indeed, searching for information online has become common both in instructing and learning EFL, and the online environment is indispensable in classes as it exposes learners to real-world instantiations of language.

Son et al. (2017) contended that language learning within digital environments is contingent on the development of concrete L2 DLSs and strategies. To accelerate English acquisition, EFL learners must learn to search for, evaluate, and synthesize digital information. Similarly, Meurant (2009) noted that digital literacy in English is critical for EFL learners' development, as digital resources become increasingly crucial for L2 acquisition.

Regardless of this increasing prominence, the EFL field pays insufficient attention to L2 DLSs, especially regarding the skills and strategies necessary for the search, evaluation, and synthesis of online information; for the development of a profound understanding of the issues specific to those DLSs; and for suitable pedagogy with which to enhance EFL learners' repertoire of said skills. As Sawatdeenarunat (2014) maintained, EFL teachers have insufficient research experience to support the full development of L2 DLS or its related literacy practices necessary to reap the full rewards of the digital landscape. Guikema and Williams (2014) echoed this, noting that digital literacy is not prominent in the current practices of language learning and pedagogy. Consequently, a striking paucity of research on L2 DLSs remains, including Web search skills and process, evaluation, and synthesis skills surrounding digital information; all are neglected within the EFL context, an area that remains in its infancy.

Exploring this uncharted territory, we consider the following key question: How adequate are EFL learners' L2 DLSs today? To this end, EFL learners' L2 DLSs competence is assessed in three main dimensions: information-search skills, critical evaluation skills, and strategy selection for effective information synthesis. Further, we determine whether EFL learners' self-perceived efficacy in these three DLSs is aligned with their actual online search performance. We also explore possible factors that facilitate or impede EFL learners' ability to search for, evaluate, and synthesize digital information.

We hope this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of L2 DLSs and how such skills can be utilized most effectively by EFL students, and thereby enable them to reap the full rewards offered by the digital landscape to meet 21<sup>st</sup>-century literacy demands. This study also provides useful information with which to sustainably improve pedagogical practices of L2 DLSs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition and Theoretical Frameworks**

DLSs are subsumed under the umbrella of new literacy, which consists of skills, strategies, and dispositions (Leu et al., 2004). These DLSs clusters enable Internet users to effectively identify important questions, locate information, and critically assess, synthesize, and communicate that information. Leu et al. (2004) stressed that new literacies build on foundational literacies, including phonemic awareness, word recognition, decoding ability, vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, and other traditional reading skills. However, these alone do not meet the digital world's demands. Similarly, Martin (2005) defined digital literacy as individuals' ability to use digital tools appropriately to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize digital resources.

Thus, the new literacy and competency theories underlie this study. The new literacy theory posits that literacy's nature has evolved alongside the evolution of computer-based technologies (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Coiro & Dobler, 2007) and social forces (Leu et al., 2017). This perspective endorses awareness and understanding of emerging digital strategies to better tackle important questions and to locate, critically evaluate, synthesize, utilize, and communicate information retrieved online (Castek et al., 2007; Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu et al., 2007). Competency theory suggests a misapprehension of students' self-assessments of their DLSs and actual skills on the basis that those lacking competency tend to hold overly favorable views of their abilities (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Gross & Latham,

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/article/investigating-the-adequacy-of-efl-learners-l2-digital-literacy-skills-consistency-of-self-assessed-competence-and-actual-performance/248517](http://www.igi-global.com/article/investigating-the-adequacy-of-efl-learners-l2-digital-literacy-skills-consistency-of-self-assessed-competence-and-actual-performance/248517)

## Related Content

---

### LAPLI The Language Learning Lab: A Methodological Proposal for a Hybrid Course in a Virtual Environment

Rita de Cassia Veiga Marriott and Patricia Lupion Torres (2006). *User-Centered Computer Aided Language Learning* (pp. 133-151).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/lapli-language-learning-lab/30646](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/lapli-language-learning-lab/30646)

### Pervasive Games and Mobile Technologies for Embodied Language Learning

Paul Driver (2012). *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 50-63).

[www.irma-international.org/article/pervasive-games-mobile-technologies-embodied/74711](http://www.irma-international.org/article/pervasive-games-mobile-technologies-embodied/74711)

### Cluster and Time-Series Analyses of Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training Users: Looking Beyond Scoring Systems to Measure Learning and Engagement

John-Michael L. Nix (2014). *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 1-20).

[www.irma-international.org/article/cluster-and-time-series-analyses-of-computer-assisted-pronunciation-training-users/109828](http://www.irma-international.org/article/cluster-and-time-series-analyses-of-computer-assisted-pronunciation-training-users/109828)

### Using Technology to Examine Cultural Learning of African-Americans: Verbal and Nonverbal Messages of Deception

Michael L. Whitley (2014). *Cases on Communication Technology for Second Language Acquisition and Cultural Learning* (pp. 263-294).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-technology-examine-cultural-learning/82580](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-technology-examine-cultural-learning/82580)

## Social Presence Functions in Task-Based Language Activities in a Virtual Classroom in Second Life

Sedat Akayoglu and Golge Seferoglu (2017). *Multiculturalism and Technology-Enhanced Language Learning* (pp. 181-198).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-presence-functions-in-task-based-language-activities-in-a-virtual-classroom-in-second-life/172870](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-presence-functions-in-task-based-language-activities-in-a-virtual-classroom-in-second-life/172870)