

Chapter 6

Digital Literacy Among Teacher Educators in Ethiopia: Implications to the Achievement of SDG4 and (Education for) Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

This study was initiated to assess the status of digital competencies among teacher educators in Ethiopia. A questionnaire, adopted from an instrument previously developed to measure teachers' preparedness to use digital technology has been used to gather information. Findings indicate that teacher educators demonstrated marked strength in certain domains of competence (e.g., preparedness to use digital technologies; and attitude towards use of digital technologies); and had serious limitations in others (e.g., awareness about the shortcomings of digital technologies). With regard to factors that affect the utilization of digital technologies, teacher educators identified three factors as most important: lack of facilities, supporting resources, and training. The chapter ends by making recommendations based on the findings of the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia gives due recognition to the value of digital literacy. The country's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Policy and Strategy acknowledges that ICT is crucial in addressing access and quality of education as the vast majority of the Ethiopian population still live in remote areas where there is a severe shortage of teachers (FDRE, 2016). The ICT Policy therefore sets the following goals with regard to education: "Ensure that ICT is equally available across all levels of the school system and across all levels of the country, is an integral part of the educational system, and is used to extensively deliver quality online education" (FDRE, 2016, p.17). It is striking that the aforementioned policy doesn't make any reference to teachers and teacher educators in its objectives. However, three of the nine strategies carry provisions related to teachers, namely, achieving a critical mass of computer literate teachers, devising affordable schemes for teachers and students to acquire ICT products and services, and linking academic institutions and libraries electronically to enable both teachers and students to access information resources (FDRE, 2016).

The ICT Policy of Ethiopia also lists what it calls "key challenges" faced in deploying ICT in schools. These include the problem of maintenance, the inability of rural schools to afford the price of an internet connection, and ICT being not widely implemented across the curriculum. With regard to the preparation and development of teachers, the policy seems to be quite uncertain and admits that "teachers may not have been trained properly". This seems awkward as policy of this kind is expected to be based on a sound assessment of the situation. This was also one of the reasons why the present-study was planned and executed. In other words, the absence of any statement directly related to teachers and teacher educators in the objectives of the ICT Policy, and the uncertainty about the level of training of teachers in Ethiopia (not to mention teacher educators) are taken as adequate justification to carry out a study that explores the level of digital literacy among teacher educators.

The specific objectives of the study are to a) explore the level of digital literacy among teacher educators in Ethiopia, b) examine factors that enhance and/or limit the competence of teacher educators in using digital technologies for educational purposes, c) analyze the implications of the current level of use of digital technologies in view of achieving SDG4, and d) provide recommendations to improve digital literacy, also in the context of Education for Sustainable Development, among teacher educators in Ethiopia.

BACKGROUND

Definition, Scope, and Benefits of Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has been defined as the ability to "access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship" (UNESCO, 2018, p.6). Beyond the ability to handle computers, it involves skills such as use and production of digital media, information processing and retrieval, participation in social networks for creating and sharing knowledge, and a much wider range of professional computing skills.

Digital literacy is believed to have a significant impact on education, ranging from curriculum development to classroom practice. Digitalization of education radically changes how course content and

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