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The Link between the English Language and Digital Competences †

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Abstract: In this digital era, students are required to understand and apply the basic knowledge of digital media because of the transformation in the learning environment. This paper investigates the impact of the English language on the students' achievements in regard to their digital competencies, that is, to what extent university students whose mother tongue is not English feel confident in their ability to learn and practice new digital skills. The findings reveal that most students have positive attitudes towards technologies, however they find English language as a barrier in developing their digital competencies.

Keywords: digital competences; English language; students; higher education

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1. Objectives

Digital competences are important for future professionals who will practice their academic knowledge in different work positions. However, having in mind that the digital revolution is mainly achieved through the English language, as the *lingua franca* [1–4] of new technologies, the question is to what extent are university students to whom English is not a mother tongue confident to learn and acquire new digital skills? Therefore, the aim of this paper was to investigate the university students' self-confidence in their knowledge of the English language in relation to the use of digital technologies, their attitude towards these technologies, their related skills, and competences, and their satisfaction and needs.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this study is mixed; that is, it performs the descriptive and quantitative analysis. The participants are students from the Academy of Applied Studies of Kosovo and Metohija-Serbia (AASKM). In total, 74 students participated in the study. An adapted questionnaire to assess students' digital and language knowledge and, their perceived skills, their attitudes towards the use of digital technologies in regard to the English language was used [5–9]. To facilitate the data collection, a Serbian translation was provided along with the English version before the online questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to students of AASKM. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) data analysis software was used to analyze and provide a descriptive analysis of the data [10,11].

3. Results

A total of 100% of respondents stated that they use the Serbian language interface in email correspondence, and 79.73% use the English language interface. A similar situation is with social networks, where 41.89% of the students stated to use the English language Facebook interface, and 66.22% use the English Instagram interface. 32.43% of participants stated that they never surf the Internet through a variety of Internet browsers using the

English language version (Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Microsoft Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge), while 44.59% stated they do so occasionally and only 22.97% do it on a regular basis. A total of 47.30% of the students do not agree with the statement that their knowledge of the English language is sufficient for using different digital resources, 37.84% agree with this statement, and 14.86% are not sure. When it comes to the role of the English language in the improvement of digital competences of students, 93.24% think it is important, 6.67% are not sure, and none of the students disagree with this statement. 97.30% of the students agree with the statement that knowledge of the English language helps them to cope better with all digital challenges that may be encountered online. The findings reveal that most students have positive attitudes toward technology. However, they find the English language as a barrier to developing their digital competences.

4. Implications

The finding of this research may be taken into account for the revision of the existing education policies in Serbia regarding the position and practice of the English language related to the acquisition of digital competences among university students [12–14]. Furthermore, findings can be applied to any other non-English speaking country where university students also have the same or similar problems and barriers related to the English language and digital competences.

5. Originality Value

This research brings new insight into the problem that exists in non-English speaking countries that exist among the student population in regard to the relationship between digital literacy and English language knowledge. So far, many studies have been dealing with the issues related to the application of digital technologies in learning and teaching the English language, and to our knowledge, not much attention has been given to the importance of the English language in acquiring digital competences important for both academic and professional achievements.

6. Contribution

It is expected that the results of the research raise awareness of the importance of the English language in the present global educational and employment scene, as well as point out the substantial synergy between English language competencies and digital competences, which is more than evident.

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