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Navigating the Terrain:
Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Challenging dominant perspectives of digital literacy in Western higher education: Results from a critical integrative review of literature

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The 21st-century work environment, for which universities prepare graduates, demands multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary competencies infused with digital literacy skills essential for sustainable employability (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022; Gürbüz, Bakker, Demerouti et al., 2023). Our increasingly digitalised society reinforces the need for learners to acquire digital competencies as part of their education (Gutiérrez-Ángel, Sánchez-García, Mercader-Rubio et al., 2022). Digital literacy, defined as the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate, and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies, is still an evolving concept (UNESCO, 2018).

With the mandate to produce graduates capable of performing to expected standards in ever-changing work environments, higher education institutions continuously define the digital competencies of their graduates and how to develop them. This involves ongoing discussions about what students should learn to be digitally competent (curriculum), how they should be taught and supported (pedagogy), and the associated progression in learning (assessment) (Ilomäki, Lakkala, Kallunki et al., 2023). However, Western perspectives on learning and teaching in higher education often dominate these discussions. Given that most students in Australian universities come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, there is a need to address this gap in the literature by considering alternative perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments for digital literacy in higher education.

This study presents findings from a critical integrative review of the literature (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The aim is to identify alternative perspectives in defining the digital competencies critical in preparing students for diverse socio-cultural work environments. To achieve this, a well-known meta-framework of digital literacy (Tran, Jung, Unangst et al., 2023; Martínez, Sádaba and Serrano-Puche, 2021) will be used to map digital competencies identified in global literature, exploring and challenging the concept of a digitally competent university graduate in today's diverse world. The integrative review will also identify teaching and learning approaches (pedagogies) for developing students' digital competencies from socio-cultural perspectives, as discussed in the literature (Mahn and John-Steiner, 2012). Peer-reviewed articles, reports, and e-book chapters will be searched in global literature, with inclusion criteria focusing on keywords such as digital literacies, digital competencies, socio-cultural learning theory, teaching pedagogies, curriculum design, and learner support. Databases will include ProQuest, Scopus, and Web of Science. Relevant data will be extracted using an Excel sheet, and thematic and interpretive analyses will be employed to synthesise the data critically.

The findings will provide insights into how socio-cultural differences influence the valued aspects of digital literacy and how they are taught or assessed in higher education. This research will also offer critical insights into how teachers can inclusively support diverse students, considering unique ways to recognise prior educational experiences, learning preferences, and needs. The final output will be a conceptual framework for teaching and learning digital literacy in Western high education from socio-cultural perspectives. Ultimately, this research aims to provide a much-needed international perspective on what it means to be a digitally competent graduate in Australia and globally.

Keywords: digital literacies, digital competencies, socio-cultural learning theory, teaching pedagogies, curriculum design, and learner support.

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