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Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Digital Literacy and Support Available for Academics at a University (Pilot Study)

Saher Ali, Mark Schier

Torrens University

Without a doubt, technology is an integral part of the education sector in the 21st Century (Scull et al., 2020). In addition to being a subject matter expert in their specialist area of knowledge, academics are expected to possess digital capabilities that will allow them to deliver current and state of the art curriculum to their students (Newland and Handley, 2016). Digital literacy is defined as ‘those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society’ (Jisc, 2014). Incorporating digital literacy into a suitable continuing professional development (CPD) series may ensure the training and development of the academic workforce (Matthews, 2021). The importance digital literacy as a form of continued professional development (CPD) was most evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when all academics had to shift their teaching to an online environment (Antonopoulou et al., 2021). Many academics had to do a crash course in digital literacy to be able to create suitable online learning environments.

Digital literacy can be indicative of teaching success and the development of professional identity in the fast-evolving education sector (Mardiana, 2020). Current literature shows that in addition to prior education and qualifications, experience with digital teaching technologies is a major influence in the development of digital literacy, which may impact their professional identity (Watts, 2018). Incorporating digital literacy into CPD and using a suitable model such as Kennedy’s model for CPD may improve the digital literacy of academics. A study conducted by Butson, 2019 revealed that newly appointed academics felt left behind due to the fast pace of technology in their workplace. Another study conducted by Sanchez and colleagues (2021) also demonstrated teachers experiencing low self- perception of their digital literacy skills during their employment. Hence, “being component” in workplace technologies is strongly connected to the construction of professional identity (Avidov-Ungar and Forkosh-Baruch, 2018).

Therefore, it can be suggested the role an institution plays in developing digital capabilities of academics is important not just for successful and efficient delivery of high-quality teaching, but also for the well-being of the academics in the workplace and to develop the professional identity. Also, understanding the baseline digital capability of its employees and whether additional support is required to develop digital literacy can provide invaluable insight in professional development of an academic during its employment at an institution.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the self-perceived digital literacy of academics employed at a university and the support they have received in developing their digital literacy during their employment. The aims also include to identify support that staff require to build their DL and how Kennedy’s 3 lens of CPD may assist in improving DL programs at universities (Kennedy, 2014).

Keywords: Continuing professional development, digital literacy

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