



## **Digital Citizenship Awareness in EFL Context in Vietnam: A Project Evaluation**

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### **Introduction**

Thai Nguyen University (TNU) is a regional institution located in Thai Nguyen province in the north of Vietnam. Its mandate is to provide education training, research and technology transfer to the socio-economic and cultural development of the northern mountainous region of Vietnam. TNU has recently set new policies to widely implement e-learning by the year 2021. E-learning has operated in this institution with an initial focus on general subjects like Advanced Mathematics, Law, and Ho Chi Minh Ideology (Thai Nguyen University, 2016). Foreign language programs will be the next target to implement the e-learning platform. The university has recently upgraded its digital educational environment for its students. TNU also has the mission to provide professional development for foreign language teachers of all grades in the neighborhood and surrounding provinces. One of the professional development programs includes disseminating 21st century skills in applying technologies in K-12 foreign language teaching practices. With such important policies and missions, it can be said that technology is an essential part in assisting TNU to complete its strategic tasks in the 21st century education reform.

In the context where the use of technology is increasingly encouraged and invested to reform teaching practices in this institution, how to use technology in an appropriate way is more important than ever before. If digital citizenship awareness is prepared right at the beginning steps of the innovation, we believe TNU will not only create a professional educational environment but also help form a standard digital world for its 21st century learners and teachers. On that account, we implemented a project with the purpose of raising the awareness of digital citizenship among EFL students, EFL teachers, technologists, and administrators at Thai Nguyen University via a series of workshops on digital citizenship. This project was selected and funded by the 2017 International Exchange Alumni Small Grants Competition for alumni of U.S. Government-funded (USG) academic and professional exchange

programs. The project was implemented in a 12-month span from October 2017 to September 2018 at the selected institution. This report describes the project activities and discusses its evaluation results.

## Literature Review

Technology has now become an indispensable part the modern life and education. It has various functions in fostering learning via constructing knowledge, providing authentic context for learning by doing, visualizing, assessing, modeling, and so on (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2012). Additionally, Prensky (2012) claims that a large number of new technologies are now able to enhance the human brain's power and this process is happening in many areas and far more quickly than most people can realize (p. 2). Information and technology skills are also considered as 21st century student outcomes (p. 11). Klopfer (2008) also agrees that characteristics of digital tools fit well with 21st century skills because they provide appropriate context for students to develop complex abilities. On the one hand, students come to school with increasing exposure to a wide range of digital tools and forms for educational purposes. On the other hand, teachers use these tools as well, but they have one more mission that is to understand how these tools may affect their students over time.

Undoubtedly, “the digital world has changed how people behave and function as citizens of the ‘real world’” (Ribble, 2011, p. 13). In educational contexts in recent years, there has been increasing evidence of students’ misuse and abuse of technologies in schools. Some instances include Web site intimidation, illegal music download and information plagiarism from the Internet, cell phone use during class time, and games played on laptops or handhelds during class (Ribble, Bailey, & Ross, 2004). “Our immersion into the digital world has placed us, as professional educators, instructional technologists, media specialists, and technology leaders, into a similar state of no return. [...] As this dynamic environment continues to change, digital citizenship opportunities and challenges influence K-12 students, teachers, and school leaders” (Hollandsworth, Donovan, & Welch, 2017, p. 524). More important than ever, there needs to be a “structure” that can teach people how to “behave” and “function” with respect to technology to avoid misuse and abuse related to technology (p. 9). The term “citizenship”, according to Ribble (2011) has a new sense beyond our normal perception of geography and communities (p. 13). This new structure we want to discuss in this report is digital citizenship, “the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use” (p. 10). It provides a framework with nine elements for understanding technology issues.

The nine elements include:

- *Digital access*: full electronic participation in society
- *Digital commerce*: electronic buying and selling of goods
- *Digital communication*: electronic exchange of information
- *Digital literacy*: process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology
- *Digital etiquette*: electronic standards of conduct or procedures
- *Digital law*: electronic responsibility for actions and deeds
- *Digital rights & responsibilities*: requirements and freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world
- *Digital health & wellness*: physical and psychological well-being in a digital technology world
- *Digital security*: electronic precautions to guarantee safety

(Ribble, 2011, p. 13)

These nine elements deal with a wide range of issues related to technology, from the most basic needs of having digital access to complicated issues of the modern world that technology brings about. They provide a framework for developing responsible behaviors of using technology both inside and outside the school environment. Therefore, digital citizenship is also defined as “the ability to effectively make

sense of, navigate and exist in the digital world” (Seale & Dutton, 2012, as cited in Emejulu & McGregor, 2016, p. 2).

Because of the importance of digital citizenship in modern society, this concept has become an important component in the standard framework for students, educators, and education leaders generated by ISTE – the International Society for Technology in Education (<https://www.iste.org/standards>) to reconsider education and create innovative learning environments. For example, in the standard for students, digital citizenship means students’ management of their digital identity, awareness of their own actions in the digital world, engagement in positive, safe, legal, and ethical behavior in using technology, understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property, and their management and maintenance of digital privacy and security (ISTE, 2016). For teachers, the standard related to digital citizenship is to guide students in safe, legal, and ethical practices with digital tools and promote the management of personal data and digital identity as well as protect students’ data privacy (ISTE, 2017).

## Methodology

Twelve administrators, 10 IT officers, 46 EFL lecturers and 218 English-majored and English non-majored students (total N = 274) at TNU were invited on a voluntary basis to take part in the project. They were from 7 divisions of TNU including the Medical University, University of Communication and Technology, International School, School of Foreign Languages, University of Technology, University of Economics and Business Administration, and University of Sciences.

Before the workshop intervention series, a mini survey about their current ownership of technology and another survey based on the Digital citizenship audit form introduced by Ribble (2011) (see Appendix) were conducted among participants to examine their frequency of use of technology and the relevant appropriateness of technology use. The audit form was composed of 10 statements about technology use. A five-scale rating was used to rate each statement, ranging from “extremely important” (= 5 points) to “extremely unimportant” (= 1 point). The total scores were then calculated.

After completing the survey, all participants were invited to take part in a series of workshops about the elements of digital citizenship. Basic knowledge of the 9 elements of digital citizenship was the core content of the workshops. At the end of the intervention, participants were asked to work in groups of five to six and develop an action plan. In this action plan, the participants needed to deal with (1) solving a specific existing problem in using technology to ensure the proper use of technology in their working/learning place or (2) developing specific strategies to raise the awareness of digital citizenship in their specific working or learning situation. Participants were encouraged to partner with people from the same working positions to design the action plans. The purpose of the action plan was to help them reflect on what they have learnt from the workshops and apply their knowledge in solving a real-life problem. This could also help the project team to examine the participants’ degree of understanding and awareness of digital citizenship after attending the workshops. Scoring rubrics developed by Ribble (2011) were used to evaluate the action plans. The rubrics included 7 objectives, each objective had a rating scale of 4: 4-exemplary performance, 3-at or above average, 2-at or below average, 1-low performance. The total scores were then calculated.

## Findings and Discussion

### Before the Workshop Series

The results of the mini survey conducted before the implementation of the workshops showed that 100% of the participants owned smartphones and used the Internet every day for their work and life. However, more than 94% had never heard of the term “digital citizenship” or ISTE standards.

To help clarify the current situation of using technology at TNU, the Digital citizenship audit form introduced by Ribble (2011) was then shared with the participants after they had completed the mini survey. As seen in Table 1, the findings of the audit form revealed that 80% of the participants was in the 30-39 score range, which means technology use at TNU was moderately high but above average technology misuse. Twelve percent was in the highest range of score, 40-50, meaning high frequency use of technology and high inappropriate technology use. The rest of the respondents, 8%, belonged to the range of 20-29 score, denoting “the middle of the road”, that means the university participants either were not using a great deal of technology or they were unaware of the issues related to digital citizenship.

TABLE 1  
*Audit Form Results Based on the Interpretation of Scores as Adapted from Riddle (2011, p. 50)*

Score	Interpretation	Percent
40-50	This score shows that use of technology is high in this school or district. Unfortunately, inappropriate technology use is also very high.	12 % (N = 33)
30-39	Technology use in this school or district is moderate to high. With increased use there is above average technology misuse as well.	80 % (N = 219)
20-29	A score in this range denotes the middle of the road. Either the school or district is not using a great deal of technology or educators are unaware of the issues related to digital citizenship.	8 % (N = 22)
10-19	A score in this range indicates a low amount of inappropriate technology use. The school or district is either not using technology or the digital citizenship problems are minimal.	0%
		100% (N = 274)

The survey findings somehow suggest that participants’ use of technology was at a moderate to high level and technology misuse also ranged from average to high. It can be inferred that more important than ever, the awareness of digital citizenship needed to be raised among all stakeholders of the institution, especially at a time when TNU has proposed educational reforms with technology in 21st century education.

### After the Workshop Series

In total, we received 57 actions plans for different situations, 4 for the administrative level, 9 for teaching situations, and 44 for learning situations.

All the action plans at the administrative level demonstrated a good understanding of the digital citizenship topic and a high concern to foster actions that could improve technology access as well as appropriate technology use at their own institutions. One of the plans, for example, planned to spend a larger amount of the school budget on the technology infrastructure such as better Internet connection and computer labs because digital access was still limited to all students and teachers. Another focused on disseminating knowledge about the nine elements of technology issues by organizing workshops for

teachers at their institutions. They believed that knowing these was important for teachers who worked online with students on a daily basis; hence, those teachers could continue equipping their learners with the how and what of proper technology use.

A number of EFL teachers' action plans were concerned with their students' digital etiquette when they were involved in social media groups. The main reason behind this was that many EFL teachers used Facebook groups as a means of class communication. Many students tended not to show good manners in giving comments or sharing improper contents with or without purpose in social media groups. These action plans focused on improving students' digital etiquette when taking part in social media communication or online group discussions.

A couple of other action plans by teachers were targeted at disadvantaged students who had limited digital access to online homework in blended learning or e-learning courses. They planned to assign students in groups with those who could share the devices and made a proposal to the administrators to open the library and computer labs for a longer time at night and at weekends. On that account, all students would have equal digital access to learn in a digital world.

One action plan by teachers was about ensuring students' original contribution of work in online learning. The action plan based on the concern that when the students did the online progress test or submitted English written assignments online, how teachers could check the originality of students' work to avoid plagiarism. Particularly, students were required to submit their academic English essays quite often. At the time being, no plagiarism software or tool was purchased by their university so their action plan initially aimed at raising students' awareness of the risks and consequences of plagiarism. Also related to copyright and authorship, another action plan focused on helping their students with how to search and select photos with copyright label for reuse. The idea behind this action plan was that their students regularly gave oral presentations in class and used a lot of images found on Google without knowing which ones were labeled for reuse.

Students' action plans were quite different from their teachers and administrators. They were more practical and specific, suitable for students' everyday life and academic study. For example, one group planned to design an application for time management and digital health. This action plan aimed at solving the problem of the overuse of the Internet among students for entertainment purposes and social networks. Another group of students planned to integrate digital citizenship into their teaching internship program at secondary schools. They argued that more and more secondary school students were allowed to use smartphones by their parents so they needed to have an understanding of the proper use of technology right at the early ownership of mobile devices.

Also aimed at school students during their English teaching practicum, another group of students in the English Language Teaching undergraduate program proposed a YouTube-related action plan based on their observation of the school students they met. In their action plan, they would make a video for parents to explain the dangers of letting their children watch YouTube videos as a way of babysitting and further explained the negative effects of children's speaking the "YouTube language". They reasoned that they had seen some children speaking the "YouTube language", which meant they sometimes tried speaking some foreign-like languages but actually they were not. This was the consequence of watching videos in other languages rather than in their mother tongue on YouTube for hours. The children copied what they heard without really understanding its meaning.

All 57 action plans from all types of participants were evaluated with the scoring rubrics developed by Ribble (2011). As presented in Table 2, 70% of the action plans received the highest score range for their good understanding of digital citizenship and applying the concept to solve real-life problems. About 28% of the action plans received above-average scores. The remaining 2% (only 1 action plan) did not show much understanding of the theme related to digital citizenship and presented an off-topic idea.

TABLE 2  
*Rubrics Scoring Results Based on the Score Interpretation by Riddle (2011)*

Scoring	Interpretation	Percent
25-28	exemplary understanding of the topic and digital citizenship. Student has a good understanding of the concept.	70% (N = 40)
22-24	above average understanding of the topic and digital citizenship. Student understands the topic but still needs additional resources.	28% (N = 16)
20-21	average understanding of the topic and digital citizenship. Student has little knowledge of the topic. Student needs more time to learn about this topic and the overall concept of digital citizenship.	2 % (N = 1)
17-19	low understanding of the topic and digital citizenship. Student has little knowledge of the topic, more work is needed.	0%
Below 17	Student has no understanding of the topic or is uninterested.	0%
		Total 100% (N = 57)

In summary, almost all of the action plans demonstrated high awareness and good understanding of digital citizenship and its related issues in educational policies and language teaching/learning practice. Apart from that, they also revealed participants' ability to make an impact on other people and the community around them with regards to the appropriate use of technology. Their ideas were varied, aiming at different issues in everyday life from administrative to a personal level. This was strong proof of the success of the project in achieving its aims.

## Conclusion

The project has proved its significant contribution to those who take part in digital life every day in the sense that they have better understanding of the essentials of appropriate technology use and commit to take actions to change their own behaviors and others' in order to become responsible digital citizens. With workshop activities centered on the nine elements of digital citizenship, the participants have gained much knowledge about this new issue of the modern world. Their action plans also strongly demonstrate the potential impact to indirect beneficiaries of the project, disseminate the awareness of the topic to a wider community. However, the project was conducted at only one university in Vietnam and mainly with EFL teachers and students, so its impact did not cover a vast audience. In conclusion, institutions need to be more open to discuss the issues that they are not well-informed of in this quickly developing time of technology (Ribble, 2012). Teachers also need to integrate the content of digital citizenship in the syllabi or provide accessible resources for both students and parents. Students are growing up in this digital world and need to build their understanding of what is appropriate technology use. Education should be an important part of this process to shape smart 21st century digital citizens.

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**Appendix**

**Digital Citizenship Audit Form (Ribble, 2011, p. 51)**

<b>DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP</b>	<b>Extremely important</b>	<b>Somewhat important</b>	<b>Neither important nor unimportant</b>	<b>Somewhat unimportant</b>	<b>Extremely unimportant</b>	<b>Score</b>
Using cell phones to text message text answers to other students	5	4	3	2	1	
Using emails or websites to intimidate other students	5	4	3	2	1	
Downloading files illegally from the Internet	5	4	3	2	1	
Being unable to complete class projects or research activities because of a lack of access to technology	5	4	3	2	1	
Using a computer in an awkward position	5	4	3	2	1	
Plagiarizing information obtained from the Internet	5	4	3	2	1	
Using cell phones during class time	5	4	3	2	1	
Posting private information on the Internet	5	4	3	2	1	
Going online to buy and sell items on auction sites during school	5	4	3	2	1	
Dropping out of school for lack of distant learning alternatives	5	4	3	2	1	
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>						