



DigIT: Developing Digital Skills and Tools for Better Inclusion of Refugees and Immigrants

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Toolkit to higher education (HE) training for educators

CHAPTER-8

Digital literacy skills to consider



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Introduction

Access to higher education (HE) is a fundamental right that should be granted to all individuals regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. However, refugees and immigrants often face numerous barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their desire and motivation to access HE. These barriers can be cultural, social, economic, and legal in nature, and they require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to overcome.

HE professionals play a crucial role in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants, as they are in a unique position to provide tailored support and guidance. However, HE professionals need to be aware of the specific challenges faced by refugees and immigrants and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to address these challenges.

This digital toolkit is designed to address this need by providing HE professionals, student association members, social workers, teachers/career advisors from schools and colleges, and workers from refugee support organizations with a comprehensive guide on how to facilitate access to HE for refugees and immigrants. The toolkit's objectives are to raise the level of competence and socio-economic awareness among HE professionals, enhance refugees/immigrants' professional and personal growth, and encourage refugees/immigrants to pursue their education and contribute to community development.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the toolkit, the recommendations provided are based on the latest legal and policy developments affecting access to HE, as well as the best practices identified by experts in the field. This digital toolkit was created to serve as a valuable resource for HE professionals and other stakeholders involved in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants. By equipping HE professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants, we can promote social inclusion, diversity, and community development.

Chapter 8-

Digital literacy skills to consider

Introduction:

In today's increasingly digital world, access to digital literacy skills is crucial for individuals to fully participate and thrive in various aspects of life, including education. For refugees and immigrants seeking higher education, the acquisition and development of digital literacy skills play a vital role in overcoming barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for success. However, accessing higher education can be particularly challenging for these populations due to a range of factors, including limited access to technology, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with digital tools and platforms (European Commission, 2016). In this context, it becomes imperative to address the issue of digital literacy skills for refugees and immigrants to facilitate their access and integration into higher education institutions. Starting with a background of the issue, this module discusses strategies for assessing digital literacy skills and identifying areas for improvement followed by the role of technology in supporting digital literacy skills development in higher education.

Background of the Issue

Digital literacy encompasses a range of competencies, including the ability to use and navigate digital devices, access and evaluate online information, communicate effectively through digital channels, and utilize digital tools for learning and collaboration. These skills are essential in today's educational landscape, where digital platforms are widely used for course materials, research, online discussions, and virtual classrooms. Proficiency in digital literacy empowers individuals to engage with educational resources, participate in online learning communities, and effectively communicate and collaborate with peers and educators.

However, refugees and immigrants often face unique challenges in acquiring digital literacy skills. Many individuals in these populations have limited or no prior exposure to technology and lack access to digital devices and reliable internet connections. Additionally, language barriers may further impede their ability to navigate and utilize digital tools effectively. These challenges can create significant barriers to accessing higher education, as institutions increasingly rely on digital platforms for information dissemination and communication.

Recognizing and addressing the issue of digital literacy skills for refugees and immigrants is essential for promoting equitable access to higher education. By providing targeted support and resources, educational institutions can empower these individuals to develop the necessary digital competencies to navigate the digital landscape of higher education. This includes initiatives such as providing access to digital devices, ensuring reliable internet connectivity, offering language support, and delivering comprehensive digital literacy training programs.

Moreover, collaboration between educational institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community stakeholders is crucial in addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with digital literacy for refugees and immigrants. By working together, these stakeholders can pool resources, share best practices, and develop comprehensive strategies that address the specific needs and circumstances of these populations.

Digital literacy skills are a significant issue for refugees and immigrants seeking access to higher education due to several reasons:

- ***Technological barriers:*** Many refugees and immigrants come from countries or regions with limited access to technology and digital resources. They may have limited exposure to computers, the internet, and digital tools. Without adequate digital literacy skills, navigating online learning platforms, accessing educational resources, and effectively utilizing technology in higher education can be challenging.
- ***Language proficiency:*** Language barriers often accompany the refugee and immigrant experience. Digital literacy skills require a certain level of language proficiency to navigate online content, understand instructions, communicate effectively, and engage in collaborative activities. Inadequate language skills can hinder refugees and immigrants from fully participating in higher education, including online courses and digital learning environments.
- ***Educational disparities:*** Refugees and immigrants may come from countries with educational systems that lack resources and infrastructure necessary to develop digital literacy skills. They may not have had access to quality education or training in digital technologies. As a result, they may face a significant gap in digital skills compared to their peers in higher education, making it difficult for them to succeed academically in a technology-driven learning environment.

- ***Cultural differences and unfamiliarity with digital tools:*** The use of technology and digital tools in education can vary across cultures and educational systems. Refugees and immigrants may be unfamiliar with the specific digital platforms, software, or tools commonly used in higher education settings. Lack of familiarity and experience with these tools can hinder their ability to engage in online learning activities, collaborate with peers, and complete assignments effectively.
- ***Digital divide and limited resources:*** Refugees and immigrants often face socioeconomic challenges, including limited access to technology, internet connectivity, and digital resources. They may lack the financial means to acquire necessary hardware, software, or reliable internet connections. This digital divide can create inequalities in accessing and utilizing digital resources required for higher education, impeding their digital literacy skills development.
- ***Digital information overload and critical evaluation:*** The digital landscape is vast and filled with information from various sources, making it essential to develop critical evaluation skills. Refugees and immigrants need to acquire digital literacy skills to evaluate the credibility, reliability, and relevance of online information for academic purposes. Without these skills, they may struggle to distinguish accurate information from misinformation or make informed decisions based on reliable sources.

Strategies for assessing digital literacy skills and identifying areas for improvement

Assessing the digital literacy skills of refugees and immigrants is crucial for understanding their current proficiency levels and identifying areas for improvement. By employing effective assessment strategies, educational institutions and stakeholders can tailor their support and interventions to meet the specific needs of these populations. Here are some strategies for assessing digital literacy skills and identifying areas for improvement:

- ***Pre-assessment surveys:*** Administering pre-assessment surveys allows educational institutions to gather information about the digital literacy skills of refugees and immigrants before they enter higher education programs. These surveys can include questions about their familiarity with digital devices, internet usage, experience with online tools and platforms, and their self-perceived proficiency levels. Pre-assessment surveys provide a broad overview of the learners' digital skills and help identify areas where support and training are most needed.

- ***Computer-based assessments:*** Computer-based assessments provide a more in-depth evaluation of individuals' digital literacy skills. These assessments can include tasks such as navigating online platforms, conducting internet searches, using productivity tools like word processors and spreadsheets, and communicating through email or messaging applications. Computer-based assessments can provide objective measures of proficiency and identify specific areas where individuals may require additional training or support.
- ***Practical assignments and projects:*** Incorporating practical assignments and projects into the curriculum allows educators to observe firsthand how refugees and immigrants apply their digital literacy skills in real-world contexts. Assignments can include tasks such as researching and creating presentations, collaborating on group projects using digital tools, or participating in online discussions. Through these assignments, educators can assess individuals' ability to utilize digital tools effectively, critically evaluate online information, and engage in digital communication and collaboration.
- ***Language proficiency assessments:*** Language proficiency is closely intertwined with digital literacy skills, particularly for refugees and immigrants who may be learning a new language. Assessments that measure language proficiency, such as standardized language tests or oral interviews, can provide insights into the language barriers individuals may face in utilizing digital tools and platforms. Identifying language gaps can help inform targeted language support programs to enhance digital literacy skills.
- ***Feedback and self-reflection:*** Providing opportunities for individuals to reflect on their own digital literacy skills and receive feedback from educators and peers is an effective strategy for self-assessment and improvement. Through self-reflection exercises, learners can evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, set goals for improvement, and seek assistance where needed. Feedback from educators can also highlight specific areas where individuals can focus their efforts to enhance their digital literacy skills.
- ***Continuous monitoring and formative assessments:*** Digital literacy skills are continually evolving, and it is essential to monitor progress and provide ongoing formative assessments. Regular check-ins, quizzes, and mini-assignments can help track individuals' growth in digital literacy and identify areas that require additional attention. Continuous monitoring and formative assessments allow for timely interventions and personalized support to ensure individuals' digital literacy skills are constantly improving.

- ***Collaborative assessments and peer learning:*** Incorporating collaborative assessments and peer learning activities into the educational environment can provide valuable insights into digital literacy skills. Peer assessments allow learners to evaluate each other's digital work, provide feedback, and learn from one another. Collaborative projects encourage teamwork, problem-solving, and the development of digital skills through interaction and knowledge sharing. These approaches foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment while facilitating the identification of areas for improvement.

By employing a combination of these assessment strategies, educational institutions can gain a comprehensive understanding of refugees' and immigrants' digital literacy skills and identify areas for improvement. This knowledge can inform the development of targeted interventions, training programs, and support services that enable these populations to enhance their digital competencies and succeed in higher education.

The role of technology in supporting digital literacy skills development in higher education.

In the context of higher education for refugees and immigrants, technology plays a pivotal role in supporting the development of digital literacy skills. It offers a range of tools, platforms, and resources that can enhance access, engagement, and learning outcomes. Here are key ways in which technology supports digital literacy skills development in higher education for refugees and immigrants:

Access to information and resources: Technology provides refugees and immigrants with unprecedented access to a wealth of information and educational resources. Online platforms, digital libraries, and educational websites offer a vast array of materials, including e-books, academic journals, video tutorials, and interactive learning modules. This access to information empowers learners to explore topics of interest, conduct research, and expand their knowledge base, fostering digital literacy and critical thinking skills.

Language learning and translation tools: Language proficiency is crucial for digital literacy. Technology offers language learning applications, online courses, and translation tools that aid refugees and immigrants in improving their language skills. These tools provide opportunities for practicing reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the target language, helping individuals overcome language barriers and enhance their digital communication abilities.

Online learning platforms: Virtual learning environments and online platforms have revolutionized higher education by making education accessible anytime, anywhere. Platforms such as learning management systems (LMS) facilitate the delivery of course materials, assignments, and assessments, enabling refugees and immigrants to engage in remote learning. Online platforms also promote self-paced learning, allowing individuals to progress at their own speed and revisit materials as needed to reinforce digital literacy skills.

Digital skills training programs: Technology-based training programs specifically designed to enhance digital literacy skills are valuable resources for refugees and immigrants. These programs offer interactive modules and tutorials that cover various digital skills, such as using productivity software, internet research, online collaboration tools, and cybersecurity practices. Through guided instruction and hands-on practice, learners can acquire and strengthen their digital competencies.

Communication and collaboration tools: Technology provides platforms for effective communication and collaboration, vital for higher education in a digital era. Email, video conferencing, instant messaging, and discussion boards enable learners to interact with professors, peers, and support staff, fostering a sense of community and engagement. Collaborative tools and project management platforms facilitate teamwork and virtual group projects, allowing refugees and immigrants to develop essential digital collaboration and problem-solving skills.

Digital literacy support resources: Online communities, forums, and help centers offer valuable support for refugees and immigrants seeking to improve their digital literacy skills. These resources provide tutorials, troubleshooting guides, FAQs, and peer support, addressing common challenges and technical issues. Learners can access user-friendly resources that cater to different proficiency levels and learning styles, ensuring personalized assistance and continuous skill development.

Mobile learning opportunities: Mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, play a significant role in supporting digital literacy skills development. Mobile learning applications and mobile-optimized websites offer flexible and on-the-go learning experiences. With mobile devices, refugees and immigrants can access educational content, participate in interactive exercises, and engage in language learning activities, irrespective of their physical location or limited access to traditional computing resources.

Digital citizenship and online safety education: Technology also provides opportunities to educate refugees and immigrants about digital citizenship and online safety. Online resources, tutorials, and workshops can help learners navigate the digital landscape responsibly, teaching them about online privacy, cybersecurity, information evaluation, and ethical use of technology. By promoting digital citizenship, technology ensures that individuals develop the necessary skills and knowledge to engage safely and ethically in the digital world.

External Sources

- The UN Refugee Agency - Higher Education Programs for Refugees:
<https://www.unhcr.org/education/higher-education.html>
- The European Commission's Erasmus+ Program for Refugees:
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-refugees_en
- The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>
- The Journal of Refugee Studies: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs>
- The Migration Policy Institute: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>
- The International Association of Universities - Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Higher Education: <https://www.iau-aiu.net/Refugees-Displaced-Persons-and-Higher-Education>
- The World University Service of Canada - Student Refugee Program:
<https://www.wusc.ca/our-work/student-refugees/>
- The Refugee Education Initiative: <https://refugeeeducationinitiative.org/>
- The Higher Education Support Program by the Open Society Foundations:
<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/what-we-do/themes/higher-education-support-program>
- The International Refugee Assistance Project: <https://refugeerights.org/>
- European website on Integration: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/report-health-refugees-and-migrants-who-european-region_en

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