Revisiting TEFL in Higher Education in Morocco in Post-Covid 19

Sana SAKALE, Taoufik ALAOUI HICHAMI
Laboratoire Langage et Société
Université Ibn Tofail, Faculté des Langues, Lettres et Arts de Kenitra, Maroc

Abstract - “Digital Citizenship” stands for “norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use.” (Ribble and Bailey, 2007, p 10). It is a varied set of concepts used to communicate, broadcast, store and manage one’s interaction with other people. To overcome the different problems that are surrounded by “Digital Citizenship”, this paper will present some suggestions that can help in the implementation of the concept of “Digital Citizenship” in Moroccan universities in order to have global future generations who are open but vigilant towards sensitive issues.

Key Words - TEFL; Digital Citizenship; Higher Education; Media.

Introduction:

“Digital Citizenship” stands for “norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use.” (Ribble and Bailey, 2007, p 10). It is a varied set of concepts used to communicate, broadcast, store and manage one’s interaction with other people. Since the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, the challenge of adapting to the new situation has urged the reshaping of different sectors, especially the educational sector. Therefore, the implementation of some digital concepts in this domain, namely “Digital Citizenship”, has become a must to assist during teaching and learning by simplifying the act of sharing and providing educational material. In other words, the combination of print, records, audio, and video technologies motivates the learners, hence making the teaching/learning process smoother and easier. Technology can enhance the efficiency and efficacy of education at all levels, both formal and informal, especially in the Third Millennium. Still, some of the main challenges are related to the way teachers, especially in Higher Education, use those technologies for the sake of motivating students, gaining time, disseminating information appropriately, and sensitizing them to the importance of becoming digital citizens. No one can deny that “Digital Citizenship” is of capital importance in the Moroccan higher education system; therefore, media can help effectively reshape people’s perceptions of different global issues. However, this very fact is surrounded by many limitations that hinder practising “Digital
Citizenship” concepts during teaching and learning such as the erroneous ideas assimilated by media. These limitations are, in fact, very serious and may lead to some long-term negative effects on people’s future careers. To overcome the different problems that are surrounded by “Digital Citizenship”, this paper will present some suggestions that can help in the enactment of “Digital Citizenship” concepts in Moroccan universities to have global future generations who are open but vigilant toward sensitive issues.

1. TEFL in a Digital Era

Nowadays, the idea of TEFL in the digital era has been recurrent and widespread worldwide. Still, its spread has got a historical background, most specifically in the Moroccan context; TEFL has been of great significance since its introduction into the Moroccan universities in the 1960’s and its growth in influence in the era of globalization (Belhiah et al, 2020). More than that, TEFL is highly valued amongst Moroccan university students (Ben Ajiba and Zerhouni, 2019), not only because it is an international language, but due to its ability to provide enough room to teach and learn new skills in the Moroccan higher educational system.

First of all, the importance of teaching and learning English has clearly increased in the globalisation era and the beginning of the Third Millennium with the advancement of technologies. This being the case, it has become primordial for teachers at all levels to make the best out of these technologies:

“English language educators recognize the importance of using digital resources to teach students in a variety of modalities.” (Sartor, 2020, p 2)

Still, the use of these technologies was not regulated, and many institutions did not make it easy for educators and students to benefit from the possible advantages technology could bring. For this reason, at the end of the Third Millennium’s first decade and the beginning of its second decade, many voices started talking about the necessity of including technology in education, most specifically concepts like “Digital Literacy”, “Digital Citizens”, “Digital Access”, and many other concepts that have ultimately been covered up by a bigger concept which is “Digital Citizenship”.

Many authors have shared their standpoints concerning this concept from speaking about ideas such as social inequalities in digital communities (Mossberger et al, 2008), digital citizens in a digital community (Ohler, 2010), new modes of literacies (Sismek and Simsek, 2013), measuring the scale for digital citizenship (Choi, 2016), planning a model for the integration of Digital Citizenship in schools (Ribble and Park, 2019), teaching practices and strategies for Digital Citizenship (Rogers-Whitehead, 2019) to considering this concept in post Covid 19 era (Buchholz et al, 2020). Therefore, the idea of integrating technology into schools has been scholarly supported since new educational perspectives have been highlighted and gave more space for educators to create brand new material for their students.


Since the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, the challenge of adapting to the new situation has urged the reshaping of the educational sector, most specifically higher education. Technology can increase the efficiency and efficacy of education at all levels, both formal and informal, especially in the Third Millennium. Still, some of the main challenges are related to the way teachers, especially in Higher Education, use those technologies for the sake of
motivating students, gaining time, disseminating information appropriately, and sensitizing them to the importance of becoming digital citizens.

Initially, one of the problems that Covid 19 uncovered was “Digital Access” (Mossberger et al, 2008; Ribble and Bailey, 2007; Ribble and Park, 2019). In Morocco, access to technology did not cover all university students, maybe because no one was prepared to stop going to schools and resort to a hundred percent online courses. With this in mind, it was clear that there was no equitable distribution of digital access amongst students, and that justifies their lack of commitment to attend classes, sessions and/or seminars online. What is needed in this case is that “educators need to provide options for lessons and data collection such as free access in the community or provide resources for the home.” (Ribble and Park, 2019).

The breakout of Covid 19 showed that adapting to and adopting technological devices during teaching and learning was challenging for educators and learners. This idea is referred to as “Digital Fluency” (Ribble and Park, 2019; Rogers-Whitehead, 2019); that’s to say, educators and learners fought hard to know how to use technology to serve the educational purposes. The problem lied first in the type of material that is going to be taught and then the way it will be disseminated with the students because “The main challenges related to digital learning concerned the provision of resources, access to high-speed Internet, and the availability of good mobile devices through which to download and upload any information from various sites, sources, and platforms. Another challenge is the need for social contacts” (Milenkova and Lendzhova, 2021, p 8). In this regard, social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp as well as Zoom app served as the first alternative to resume the teaching learning process.

Ultimately, E-learning in the Moroccan universities was limited to video recordings and drive-shared documents. Despite the efforts of educators to share documents for students as a homework or to be able to design tests and examinations online, many of the teachers and students needed prior training on these platforms. Therefore, teaching and learning increased the importance of technology in today’s educational system.


The implementation of some digital concepts in this domain, namely “Digital Citizenship”, as one of the alternatives in post Covid 19 era has become a must to make teaching and learning easier by simplifying the act of sharing and providing educational material in the Moroccan universities. In other words, the integration of “Digital Citizenship” as a course in the Moroccan universities will help promote digital understanding because the combination of print, records, audio, and video technologies motivates the learners will provide easier access to technological resources at the universities, both for educators and students.

To begin with, one of the comprehensive descriptions of “Digital Citizenship” is “‘norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use.’” (Ribble and Bailey, 2007, 10). That’s to say, this concept will help enhance students’ understanding towards digital issues such as their online privacy, their digital footprint as well as know their digital rights and responsibilities in a virtual world. Clearly, being tech savvy is not only about knowing how to use social media, maybe install and uninstall apps from one’s computer or mobile phone, but it transcends it towards knowing how to remain safe, savvy and social (Ribble and Park, 2019; Rogers-Whitehead, 2019).

Therefore, concepts such as “Digital Citizenship” can sensitize to the significance of becoming a digital citizen. (Ribble and Bailey, 2007) and could be of of capital importance to the Moroccan higher educational system. This concept contains nine elements Digital Access,
Digital Commerce, Digital Communication, Digital Literacy, Digital Etiquette, Digital Law, Digital Rights and Responsibilities, Digital Health and Wellness and Digital Security (self-protection) (Ribble, Bailey and Ross 2004, p 7), hence these may serve as a framework for brand new university courses. In doing so, Moroccan universities, and most specifically its English departments, will have the ability to innovate and include these new modules/subjects in addition to the already existing ones. Pedagogically speaking, the material being taught will be diversified and will provide new dimensions for educators and students to bridge the digital divide and sensitize to the importance of becoming global citizens.

4. The Role of Media in Sensitizing with the Significance of Digital Citizenship

In the era of globalisation, media has become an important asset in the dissemination of ideas and concepts (Goodmacher, Kajiura, 2017). At the educational level, Covid 19 pandemic proved that media, most specifically social media, can be of paramount significance in helping students and educators alike to find, share and use the available information online. For this, “students need to understand the long-term impact of excessive media consumption” (Ribble, 2012, p 8).

Nowadays, most students use technology for non-educational purposes; in other words, their use of technology is limited to social media. Given the number of fake information on media in general and its impact on the daily lives of youngsters, it will be unfair to neglect that media can help effectively in reshaping people’s perceptions of different global issues:

“These online educational experiences can be viewed as a form of crisis management. This leaves space to re-create and reimagine a more expansive and experiential view of the critical literacy practices necessitated for digital citizenship in the post-COVID-19 world. In light of our personal and collective online experiences during COVID-19, we are challenged to reconsider the question, what kind of citizens does our 21st-century democracy require?” (Buchholz et al, 2020, p 12).

This being the case, both educators and students need to consider the opportunity of using social media in the teaching learning process for better educational experiences; in other words, opening a discussion about how students and teachers alike make use of social media might be helpful in identifying for example ways to keep safe and be aware of the risks that may rise up in the virtual world such as “bullying” or “sexting”. Also, with the help of educators, it may be possible to think about ways to know about one’s prerogatives and duties in a digital world because they are not only citizens, but they have turned into digital citizens aware of the possible opportunities provided for them in the World Wide Web.

Conclusions

As one of the developing countries such as Morocco, the implementation of technology remains limited due to many problems that hinder its implementation. However, this very fact is surrounded by many limitations that hinder the implementation of “Digital Citizenship” as a course in teaching and learning. Hence, some suggestions can be helpful in this regard.

One of the suggestions that might help keep up with the Third Millennium changes is the urgent need to add up concepts that promote digital understanding. As far as we’re living in a digital world, concepts such as “Digital Fluency” or “Digital Rights and Responsibilities” might be of paramount significance in sensitizing students to the importance of knowing how to deal with technology while being resilient when dealing with their virtual environment. Not only that, a “Digital Citizenship” course entails learning more about appropriate digital behaviours; in other words, the students will be able to rethink the way they behave online by knowing how to react
to “bullying” and/or “sexting” issues. In fact, this will help them have a broader vision in terms of the appropriate use of technology, not only be Media consumers:

Media can help in the movement towards new educational perspectives in order to have more “Global Citizens” than “Local Citizens”. (Dann Ashley, 2018, p 3)

Finally, Media may be an important asset in helping educators and students alike to revisit their educational perspectives and create better educational environment. Similarly, using Media for educational purposes will open doors for educators and students to become “Global/Digital Citizens” who are capable of discussing issues linked to “Digital Citizenship” in the hope to bridge the “Digital Divide” between the students as “Digital Natives” and their educators as “Digital Immigrants”.

References:


RICHARDSON, Janice and MILOVIDOV Elizabeth. 2019. Digital citizenship education handbook: being online, well-being online, rights online. Council of Europe Publishing.


