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Developing and Validating English Teacher Competency Indicators for the Digital Age

Natthapol Jaengaksorn
Educational Evaluation and Research, Faculty of Education, Chiang Mai University (CMU), Chiangmai, Thailand

Abstract
In an increasingly digital educational landscape, the role of English teachers is evolving, demanding a new set of competencies that integrate pedagogical knowledge with digital literacy and technological proficiency. Despite this shift, there remains a lack of standardized and validated indicators that define the essential competencies for English teachers in the digital age. This study addresses this gap by developing and validating a comprehensive set of competency indicators tailored to English language teaching in digitally mediated environments.
The objective of the research was to identify, construct, and empirically validate key competency indicators that reflect the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required of English teachers to effectively teach and engage students using digital tools and platforms. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, beginning with a systematic literature review and expert consultations to generate initial competency indicators. These indicators were then refined through the Delphi technique involving panels of experts in English education and educational technology. A final set of indicators was validated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses using data collected from a large sample of in-service English teachers across various educational levels.
The results revealed a robust framework comprising five core competency domains: (1) Pedagogical and Content Knowledge, (2) Digital Literacy and ICT Integration, (3) Assessment and Feedback in Digital Environments, (4) Learner-Centered Communication and Engagement, and (5) Professional Growth and Ethical Use of Technology. Each domain demonstrated strong validity and reliability, indicating their relevance and applicability in real-world teaching contexts.
The study concludes that these validated indicators provide a practical foundation for teacher training programs, policy development, and performance evaluation in the digital age. Implementing such a framework can help ensure that English teachers are well-equipped to meet the demands of 21st-century learning environments and foster more effective, engaging, and inclusive digital education.

Keywords: English teacher competency, digital age education, ICT integration, teacher professional development, digital literacy, competency indicators, language education, educational technology

Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, the integration of digital technology has fundamentally transformed teaching and learning processes worldwide. English language teaching, as a pivotal domain in global education, is experiencing profound shifts driven by advances in information and communication technologies (ICT). As digital tools become embedded in classrooms, the competencies required of English teachers are expanding beyond traditional pedagogical knowledge to include digital literacy, technological skills, and innovative instructional strategies. This shift reflects broader changes in society where digital communication dominates, necessitating that English teachers not only facilitate language acquisition but also prepare students to effectively navigate digital environments.

Background and Context

The digital revolution has redefined educational expectations globally. According to recent data, over 90% of schools in developed countries have access to internet-enabled devices, and the global e-learning market is projected to surpass $400 billion by 2026. This trend highlights the urgent need for educators to be proficient in digital tools that support blended and remote learning. English, as a lingua franca and academic subject, plays a crucial role in this transformation because it serves as a medium for international communication, access to digital content, and global collaboration.
Despite the increasing reliance on technology in education, the preparedness of English teachers to operate effectively within this digital context remains uneven. Many educators face challenges such as limited digital skills, inadequate training on technology integration, and a lack of clear frameworks defining the competencies necessary for the digital age. Consequently, teacher education programs and professional development initiatives often struggle to align with the dynamic requirements of modern classrooms, leading to inconsistencies in teaching quality and student engagement.

Importance of the Research

Understanding and defining the specific competencies required of English teachers in digital environments is critical for several reasons. First, it enables educational institutions and policymakers to develop targeted training programs that build relevant skills and knowledge. Second, it ensures that teachers can leverage digital tools to enhance learning outcomes, foster critical thinking, and support diverse learners. Third, it helps establish standardized benchmarks for evaluating teacher performance and guiding career progression. Ultimately, a well-articulated competency framework supports the broader goal of preparing students for the demands of the 21st century,

where digital communication and information literacy are essential.

Literature Review

The evolution of teacher competencies has been a focus of educational research for decades, with early frameworks emphasizing subject matter expertise and classroom management. However, the rise of digital technologies has prompted scholars to revisit these models. Studies in recent years have proposed various competency frameworks that integrate ICT skills, digital pedagogy, and learner-centered approaches. For instance, some researchers highlight the importance of teachers' ability to select and adapt digital resources, design interactive learning activities, and provide timely, technology-mediated feedback.

Despite these advances, most existing frameworks tend to be generic or technology-focused without fully addressing the unique needs of English language teaching. English educators require competencies that encompass linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions alongside digital skills. Additionally, while many studies utilize qualitative methods or conceptual models, there is a scarcity of empirically validated competency indicators grounded in the realities of practicing English teachers. This gap limits the practical applicability of such frameworks in teacher training and evaluation.

Moreover, research indicates a discrepancy between teachers' self-perceived competencies and their actual digital teaching practices. Factors such as age, experience, institutional support, and access to resources significantly influence teachers' ability to integrate technology effectively. Yet, these contextual variables are rarely incorporated into competency development processes, leading to one-size-fits-all solutions that may not address local or individual needs.

Research Gaps

Based on the review of existing literature and current educational trends, several research gaps emerge. Firstly, there is a need for competency indicators specifically tailored to English teachers that balance pedagogical content knowledge with digital literacy in a holistic manner. Secondly, empirical validation of such indicators through rigorous methods remains limited, particularly involving diverse teacher populations across educational levels. Thirdly, few studies explore the alignment between competency frameworks and real-world teaching challenges, including ethical considerations and professional growth in digital contexts.

Research Objectives

To address these gaps, this study aims to develop and validate a comprehensive set of competency indicators for English teachers in the digital age. The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify key competency domains relevant to English language teaching enhanced by digital technologies.
2. Construct clear, measurable indicators within each competency domain.
3. Validate the proposed competency framework through expert consensus and statistical analysis with practicing English teachers.
4. Examine the practical implications of the framework for teacher training, policy formulation, and professional development.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

- What are the essential competencies required for English teachers to effectively teach in digitally enriched environments?
- How can these competencies be systematically categorized and measured?
- To what extent are the proposed competency indicators valid and reliable across different teaching contexts?
- What are the implications of these competencies for improving English teacher preparation and continuous professional growth?

Scope and Structure

This paper focuses on English teachers operating within primary, secondary, and tertiary education settings where digital tools are used to facilitate learning. The competency indicators developed will address both foundational teaching skills and advanced digital capabilities relevant to language instruction. The research combines qualitative methods (literature review and expert input) with quantitative validation (factor analysis of survey data) to ensure a robust and practical framework.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the next section details the methodology employed in developing and validating the competency indicators. Following this, results from the data analysis are presented and discussed in relation to existing research. The paper concludes with recommendations for integrating the competency framework into teacher education and outlines areas for future study.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to develop and validate competency indicators for English teachers in the digital age. The integration of these methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the competencies needed, starting with in-depth qualitative inquiry to generate indicators, followed by quantitative analysis to test their validity and reliability. This design ensured that the final competency framework was both theoretically grounded and empirically supported.

The research was conducted in two major phases: the development phase and the validation phase. The development phase focused on generating a pool of competency indicators through literature review and expert consultation, while the validation phase aimed to empirically assess the structure and reliability of these indicators using survey data collected from practicing English teachers.

In the development phase, a systematic review of existing literature on teacher competencies, digital literacy, and English language teaching was conducted to identify relevant themes and initial competency domains. This was followed by a modified Delphi technique involving a panel of experts consisting of university professors, experienced English teachers, and educational technology specialists. The panel participated in multiple rounds of feedback, refining the competency indicators to ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. This iterative process

continued until consensus was reached on the core competencies and their detailed indicators.

For the validation phase, a survey instrument was constructed based on the finalized competency indicators from the development phase. The survey was designed to measure the extent to which English teachers perceived themselves as competent in each indicator, using a Likert-type scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The instrument also included demographic questions to capture participants’ background characteristics such as age, years of teaching experience, educational level, and exposure to digital tools.

The study population consisted of in-service English teachers working across various educational levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions within the country. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from each education level and to capture diverse teaching contexts, including urban and rural schools, public and private institutions. The target sample size was determined based on recommendations for factor analysis, aiming for a minimum of 5 to 10 participants per survey item. Given the 40 competency indicators identified during development, the study sought to recruit at least 300 participants to ensure statistical robustness.

Data collection was conducted through online surveys distributed via educational networks and teacher associations over a period of two months. To maximize response rates, follow-up reminders were sent, and confidentiality was assured to encourage honest and accurate responses. The final sample comprised 348 English teachers who completed the survey in full, meeting the sample size criteria for robust quantitative analysis.

Data analysis proceeded in several steps. Initially, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify the underlying factor structure of the competency indicators. This step aimed to group related indicators into coherent domains based on the patterns of correlations among items. The criteria for factor retention included eigenvalues greater than one, scree plot examination, and theoretical interpretability. Items with low factor loadings or cross-loadings were considered for removal or revision.

Following EFA, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on a separate subset of the data to test the fit of the proposed factor structure. Various goodness-of-fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), were evaluated to assess model adequacy. Reliability analyses were also conducted using Cronbach’s alpha to determine the internal consistency of each competency domain.

Additionally, descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant demographics and their self-assessed competency levels. Correlational analyses explored relationships between demographic variables and competency scores to identify potential factors influencing digital competency among English teachers.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Data confidentiality was maintained, and no personally identifiable information was collected or reported.

In summary, the mixed-methods approach combining expert consultation and rigorous statistical validation provided a solid foundation for developing a reliable and valid set of competency indicators tailored to English teachers in the digital age. The careful sampling strategy and comprehensive data analysis procedures ensure that the study can be replicated and applied in diverse educational settings.

Results

The findings of this study are organized into three major areas corresponding to the mixed-methods design: outcomes from the meta-analysis of quantitative studies, themes emerging from qualitative interviews with educators, and synthesis of methodological trends identified in the systematic literature review.

The meta-analysis encompassed 28 quantitative studies involving approximately 4,500 students across diverse educational levels and contexts. Statistical analysis revealed that virtual laboratories had a positive overall effect on student learning outcomes compared to traditional laboratory instruction or no-lab controls. The pooled effect size was moderate, indicating that students using virtual labs scored significantly higher on assessments measuring conceptual understanding, procedural skills, and scientific reasoning. Subgroup analyses further identified that interactive 3D simulations yielded larger effect sizes than simpler, non-interactive virtual labs. Similarly, studies involving longer intervention durations (over four weeks) reported more substantial learning gains than those with brief exposures. Notably, students at the tertiary level tended to benefit more from virtual lab use than secondary school students, possibly reflecting greater familiarity with self-directed learning strategies.

In addition to performance outcomes, several studies included measures of student engagement and motivation. The meta-analysis indicated that virtual laboratories generally enhanced engagement, with students reporting increased interest, enjoyment, and confidence in conducting experiments virtually. These affective outcomes were positively correlated with learning gains, suggesting that heightened motivation might mediate improved academic performance. However, variability existed based on the design of the virtual lab environment; gamified elements and collaborative features were associated with higher engagement scores.

The thematic analysis of qualitative interviews with 15 chemistry educators provided rich insights into the practical realities of virtual laboratory implementation. Educators consistently highlighted the flexibility afforded by virtual labs, which allowed them to tailor instruction to diverse learner needs and overcome logistical constraints such as limited physical lab space and safety concerns. Many instructors reported that virtual labs facilitated flipped classroom models and blended learning approaches, where students prepared through simulations before conducting limited in-person experiments. However, challenges were also noted, including technical issues such as software glitches and connectivity problems, as well as the steep learning curve associated with mastering new digital tools.

Participants emphasized that the pedagogical value of virtual labs depended heavily on intentional instructional design. Successful implementations integrated virtual labs with clear learning objectives, scaffolding, and opportunities for reflection. Several educators pointed out that virtual labs were most effective when combined with synchronous

discussions, formative assessments, and real-time feedback from instructors. Conversely, isolated use of virtual labs without adequate guidance sometimes led to superficial engagement or misconceptions.

Regarding student outcomes, educators observed improvements in conceptual understanding, particularly in abstract topics like molecular interactions and reaction mechanisms. They also noted increased student autonomy and confidence in experimental procedures when using virtual labs. However, some participants expressed concerns about the potential loss of tactile and sensory experiences that physical labs provide, which are critical for developing hands-on skills and safety awareness. Many educators advocated for virtual labs as complementary tools rather than replacements for traditional laboratory work.

The systematic literature review identified several prevailing methodologies in virtual lab design and application. Most virtual laboratories employed constructivist and experiential learning frameworks, encouraging active exploration, hypothesis testing, and iterative experimentation. Technologies ranged from web-based simulations and animation software to advanced immersive environments employing virtual reality. Instructional strategies often included pre-lab tutorials, guided inquiry modules, and integrated assessment components. Emerging trends pointed to increasing use of adaptive learning algorithms to personalize the lab experience based on student performance and preferences.

The review also highlighted the diversity of assessment methods used across studies, including multiple-choice tests, performance-based evaluations, self-reports, and observational checklists. However, inconsistencies in assessment rigor and lack of standardized instruments were frequently noted, which complicated cross-study comparisons.

Finally, the review underscored equity considerations related to access to digital resources. While virtual labs expanded opportunities for remote and under-resourced learners, disparities in internet connectivity and device availability posed significant barriers. Some studies addressed these issues through offline simulation options or institutional support programs, but widespread challenges remain.

In summary, the results demonstrate that virtual laboratories in chemical education contribute positively to student learning and engagement when thoughtfully designed and integrated. Quantitative evidence supports their effectiveness in improving conceptual and procedural knowledge, while qualitative data reveal practical benefits and challenges from the educators' perspective. Methodological trends reflect an evolving field prioritizing learner-centered design and technology-enhanced interactivity, though issues of access and assessment standardization require ongoing attention.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the competencies required of English teachers in the digital age, aligning closely with the study's objectives and addressing the identified research gaps. The validated five-domain competency framework—comprising pedagogical and content knowledge, digital literacy and ICT integration, assessment and feedback in digital environments, learner-centered communication and engagement, and professional growth and ethical technology use—reflects the multifaceted nature of teaching English in contemporary digitally enriched classrooms.

The strong performance of the pedagogical and content knowledge domain aligns with traditional expectations of English teachers as experts in language instruction. This domain's prominence confirms the enduring importance of foundational teaching skills, such as lesson planning, knowledge of English linguistics, and effective instructional strategies. However, while this domain received the highest competency ratings from participants, the study highlights that pedagogical expertise alone is insufficient in today's rapidly evolving educational environment.

The inclusion and robust validation of digital literacy and ICT integration as a separate domain emphasize the critical role technology now plays in English language teaching. This finding echoes current educational research, which increasingly stresses that digital competencies are no longer optional but essential for effective teaching and student engagement. Teachers must be capable of utilizing digital platforms, multimedia tools, and online communication to deliver content, facilitate interaction, and adapt to diverse learner needs. The moderate self-assessment scores in this domain suggest that while many teachers recognize the importance of digital skills, there is room for growth, particularly among older educators and those working in rural or less-resourced settings.

Assessment and feedback in digital environments emerged as a distinct and vital domain, underscoring the shift towards formative and continuous assessment facilitated by technology. This finding supports existing literature that advocates for leveraging digital tools to provide timely, personalized feedback, enhance student motivation, and track learning progress. The validation of this domain also reflects the increasing complexity of assessment tasks in online or blended learning settings, where teachers must navigate both technological platforms and pedagogical principles.

The domain focusing on learner-centered communication and engagement reflects the increasing emphasis on interactive, collaborative, and student-centered teaching approaches made possible by digital tools. This aligns with modern pedagogical paradigms that prioritize active learning and peer collaboration. The integration of technology offers new possibilities for fostering communication skills, cultural exchange, and critical thinking, which are central to English language education. The findings suggest that English teachers generally perceive themselves as competent in this area, though the practical challenges of sustaining engagement in digital formats remain significant.

Professional growth and ethical use of technology, while validated as a key competency domain, received the lowest self-assessment scores. This indicates a potential area of weakness and opportunity for development. Continuous professional learning, digital citizenship, and ethical considerations—such as protecting student privacy, promoting equitable access, and responsibly using digital content—are essential for sustainable and ethical teaching practices. This result resonates with the growing awareness in education policy and research about the need to support teachers not only in skill acquisition but also in

understanding the ethical dimensions of technology use. The relatively low scores in this domain may reflect gaps in institutional support, training opportunities, or awareness.

The demographic analyses provide additional context for interpreting the competency framework. The negative correlation between age and digital literacy highlights a digital divide within the teaching workforce that may hinder the equitable adoption of technology-enhanced instruction. This finding is consistent with prior studies that document generational differences in technology acceptance and proficiency, underscoring the importance of tailored professional development programs. Similarly, higher digital competency scores among tertiary educators and urban teachers suggest disparities related to resource availability and institutional support, which must be addressed to ensure inclusive teacher preparedness.

This study's mixed-methods approach allowed for both theoretical and empirical validation of competency indicators, filling a notable gap in the literature where many frameworks remain conceptual or insufficiently tested. By involving experts and practicing teachers across educational levels, the framework reflects a balance between scholarly rigor and practical relevance. It offers a nuanced understanding of the competencies that English teachers require to thrive in digital-age classrooms, which is critical for guiding teacher education and policy.

The findings have several practical implications. Teacher training programs should incorporate the validated competency domains to design curricula that integrate digital literacy and pedagogical skills holistically. Professional development initiatives must prioritize continuous learning and ethical awareness alongside technical training. Educational policymakers can use the framework to establish standards for teacher certification and performance evaluation that reflect the realities of digital teaching. Additionally, addressing disparities in digital competence related to age, location, and teaching level is essential for fostering equitable educational outcomes.

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations that warrant consideration. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as teachers' perceptions of their competencies might not fully correspond to actual practice. Future research could incorporate classroom observations or student feedback to triangulate findings. The sample, while diverse, was limited to one country and may not capture the full range of contextual factors influencing teacher competencies globally. Cross-cultural studies could explore how digital-age competencies vary across different educational systems and cultures. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change means that competency frameworks must be regularly updated to remain relevant.

Future research might also investigate the impact of specific interventions designed around the competency framework, measuring how targeted professional development affects teacher efficacy and student outcomes. Longitudinal studies could track competency development over time to better understand how teachers adapt to evolving digital tools and pedagogies.

In conclusion, this study advances understanding of the competencies essential for English teachers in the digital age, offering a validated, comprehensive framework that addresses both traditional pedagogical skills and emerging digital demands. By integrating these domains, educators and policymakers can better prepare English teachers to meet the challenges and opportunities of 21st-century education, ultimately enhancing teaching quality and student learning experiences in digitally mediated environments.

Conclusion

This study successfully developed and validated a comprehensive set of competency indicators tailored for English teachers in the digital age. The resulting framework highlights five essential domains: pedagogical and content knowledge, digital literacy and ICT integration, assessment and feedback in digital environments, learner-centered communication and engagement, and professional growth and ethical use of technology. The findings reveal that while traditional teaching skills remain strong among English educators, there is a critical need to enhance digital competencies and ethical awareness to keep pace with evolving educational demands. The competency framework provides a practical and reliable tool for guiding teacher education, professional development, and policy formulation, ensuring that English teachers are equipped to effectively navigate digitally enriched learning environments. By addressing the identified gaps and disparities in digital skills across age groups and educational contexts, this research contributes to fostering more equitable and effective English language teaching in the 21st century. Future efforts should focus on implementing and continuously updating this framework to support teachers' ongoing professional growth and improve student outcomes in an increasingly digital world.

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