



DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The use of the internet and digital tools have become part of our lives in recent years as necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students use these digital tools extensively both in their school lessons and at their home to enhance their learning. Students' intensive daily use of technology has increased the need for training them in a way to establish safe online communication and collaboration. Hence the need for bringing the concept of digital citizenship to the fore. This paper, therefore, provided an overview of the concept of digital citizenship education in the Nigerian context. This paper sheds light on the education of young learners on the concept of citizenship and how to use technologies appropriately. An overview of digital citizenship education in secondary and tertiary institutions was the focus and it was suggested that awareness training and orientation should be periodically organized for students and teachers on the concept of digital citizenship and the safe use of technology. Also, education policymakers in Nigeria should restructure the existing curricula to include technology-based practices to enhance students' technological expertise and facilitate the appropriate use of technology as an effective learning tool.

KEYWORDS: *Digital citizenship education, digital tools, technological behaviour, digital native students.*

INTRODUCTION

The need for a transition in educational efforts from knowledge absorption to knowledge consumption and generation is driven by the growing interconnectedness of the world. Education no longer merely aims to prepare students for an effective life in their immediate society but to prepare them for life in a fast-changing world driven by technology. The development of information and communication technology over the past few years has had a big impact on various sectors, including education. Technology has impacted education to the extent that teaching and learning can be done ubiquitously defying the constraints of time, distance and space thanks to technological innovation. In terms of education, the pre-ICT era's limitations on the time and location at which learning could take place for both students and teachers have been broken by increasing access to the internet and better availability of learning resources and technical tools. With varying degrees of success depending on the unique characteristics and difficulties present at the geographical locations where it has been implemented, the undeniable growth in the educational system brought on by the use of the internet and the accessibility of digital outlets like audio and video, CDs, virtual platforms, tele and video conferencing platforms among others has primarily been implemented at secondary and tertiary institutions.

In Nigeria and at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic secondary and tertiary institutions were encouraged to transition to online learning as an alternative to traditional face-to-face learning in a bid to limit physical contact in order to halt the spread of the Coronavirus. Online learning is basically driven by the internet with lots of advantages but usually exposes students to the whims and caprices of the online digital space. Although students are digitally savvy, many risks are present in the digital world that they should be protected from. These risks include sexual exploitation, cyber-bullying, phishing, and identity theft, to mention but a few. Therefore, it is necessary for students in secondary and tertiary institutions to adequately equip themselves with appropriate digital citizenship behavioural traits that will enable them to cope in the digital space as they participate in their online learning classes. There should be no assumptions that students in secondary and tertiary institutions are fully equipped for online learning. This is because, in Nigerian educational institutions, it is crystal clear that digital immigrants i.e., persons who were raised before the digital age, are the decision makers and the teachers of the digital natives and there might be some unintentional procedural gaps in the entire online teaching and learning processes of the digital natives. Digital natives are individuals who were born during or after the integration of technology within the classroom, or the "digital age." The term digital native was originally defined as being born on or after 1980,



however, some scholars define individuals born between 1980 and 1990 as the “first generation of digital natives” (Helsper & Eynon, 2009).

The digital natives can be likened to the natives of a country or geographical space who are expected to understand and speak the language of that country to get the full benefits as citizens. As aptly opined by Fomsi (2021), digital natives speak the digital language - the language of computers, smartphones, tablets, the Internet, Web 2.0 technologies, and online video games, just to mention a few. They are required to follow the recommended code of conduct for that geographical space or region. This code of conduct contains vital information on the acceptable behaviour of the citizens that will enhance the mutual coexistence of all the stakeholders. Comparatively, looking at the digital world of the internet and online learning, there are vital pieces of information on the ethics and affordances of the digital space. Such knowledge will help all the navigators in the digital environment to maximally benefit and mutually coexist. This is referred to as digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship simply means competent and acceptable online behaviour. According to Leustig (2019), educating students about digital citizenship involves teaching them how to use technology responsibly, safely, and with good behaviour both inside and outside of the classroom. It is the capacity to communicate effectively in ways that respect both human rights and the online environment while participating critically, positively, and ethically in the digital sphere.

According to Ribble (2020) and Fomsi (2021), there are nine components to digital citizenship behaviour. Digital Access is the first and fundamental component. It speaks of a person's access to and rights within the digital sphere. Tayseer (2018) argues that since society is constantly utilizing technology, everyone should have equal access to it and to e-support in order to reap its benefits. For digital native students to effectively engage in online learning as recommended by the government, they ought to have access to digital technology. It is the responsibility of the members of society and the management of institutions to ensure that students have access to technological devices. However, having access to digital technologies is not enough, students must also know how to use these devices (digital literacy).

Digital literacy refers to the ability of a person to utilize technological devices competently. Students need to know how to use digital devices for educational and other social purposes so that they can behave properly during online learning. The right conduct while using these digital tools, such as social media, internet browsers, word processing apps, learning management systems and so on, is anchored on the knowledge and competency of students in the use of digital devices.

Also, digital communication is another element of digital citizenship. It refers to the transmission and comprehension of information. Students need to understand the different communication media to effectively participate in online learning because, with the push of a button or the click of a mouse, sensitive information can be shared unsafely. Students also need this skill to be able to make choices on which communication medium to use when working independently on assignments. It is important to caution students about what is suitable to share via digital channels as this can help reduce their exposure to unwanted online attacks (Roberto, 2019).

Increased online communication has fostered an increase in digital commerce. Buying and selling online have soared tremendously ever since the lockdowns. Students need to know the rules of digital commerce to adequately benefit from it and be protected from cyber-attacks in the digital space. Furthermore, students are usually distracted by pop-up advertisements on things that might interest them when they are learning online. They may yield to the distraction or face a cyber-attack. This attack may be traumatic to the student thereby causing him to lose concentration while learning. There might also be dangerous activities such as illegal downloads, gambling, drug deals, pornography, plagiarism, and so forth (Tohid, 2017). Therefore, it is particularly important to ensure that students have digital commerce skills.

Another element of digital citizenship behaviour is digital etiquette and it refers to understanding the standard of behaviour and practice expected of persons using a digital platform. Students ought to have good conduct as they relate with one another in an online space. This quality or value can be learnt by deliberate teaching of digital citizenship values. Therefore, knowing how to respond to harsh comments from classmates on an online platform is a great quality that students need to have.

Becoming a digital citizen means that a person is aware of the digital laws that govern the activities in the digital space. Students should be socially responsible. They are expected to ensure that their online actions; downloads, purchases, texts, and so on, conform to digital laws. Digital laws ensure that digital crimes are punished adequately. Students should be aware of these laws and abide by



them. Digital law is linked to another element which is digital rights and responsibilities. This enables students to know their rights and responsibilities in the digital global world. It further protects them from predators during online learning.

Digital health and wellness refer to how users of technology pay attention to ergonomic factors while using technology. Students ought to be aware of certain practices that are detrimental to their health and wellness. Long gazing at the computer screen, sitting in a place for a long time, playing games too often and so on could affect the students' health and they need to be adequately informed before navigating the digital space during online learning. Digital security is also very crucial in becoming digital citizens. Students need to know how to protect themselves from the internet and online threats and attacks.

Justification of the Paper

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it necessary for individuals to use the internet and other digital technologies that have recently impacted their lives, and students in both secondary and tertiary institutions have begun to use these tools heavily both in their classrooms and at home. The idea of digital citizenship is becoming a hot topic in education because of how frequently students use technology and the necessity to teach them how to collaborate and communicate safely online. In this paper, the theoretical framework of the concept of digital citizenship is x-rayed, as well as other related concepts reported in the literature regarding digital citizenship and its teaching.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Concept of Digital Citizenship

As contemporary cultures advance and make greater use of technology, the idea of digital citizenship has expanded. New definitions of the appropriate use of technology have emerged in response to new uses and abuses of technology. Alberta Education (2012), referenced in Jones and Mitchell (2016), defines citizenship as belonging to a social, political, or national community. This definition can help one to better comprehend the idea of digital citizenship. As a result, the concept has the community at its core; in other words, citizenship occurs within a community and entails both rights and obligations. Citizenship has historically been used to describe belonging to a geographic physical limit. Citizenship provides people living in a geographical region with civil, social-political and economic rights. Citizens are expected to obey the laws governing the geographical space they belong to. Citizenship is a legal status and an identity. Digital citizens recognize and value the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of living, learning and working in an interconnected digital world, and they engage in safe, legal and ethical behaviours. A digital citizen refers to a person utilizing information technology in order to engage in society, politics, and government. Haller, Li and Mossberger, (2011), define digital citizens as those who use the internet regularly and effectively. It is a concept which helps teachers, technology leaders, and parents talk about what all users should know regarding appropriate technology use. Digital Citizenship is more than just a teaching tool; it is a way to prepare students/technology users for a society full of technology. Too often we see technology users misuse and abuse technology because they are unaware of what is appropriate. The goal of this paper is to explicitly dissect what is appropriate and what could be harmful. The term "digital citizenship" describes citizenship in the digital sphere. Several authors have provided definitions of it. Digital citizenship, according to Ribble (2020), is the accepted standard of conduct for using technology in daily life. Digital citizenship may also be referred to as the norms of behavior with regard to technology use. According to Zook (2019), it involves using technology, computers, the internet, and other electronic gadgets responsibly to engage society's citizens. It implies that technology users should behave responsibly when interacting online. Digital citizenship is a comprehensive notion that includes safe behaviours when engaging in digital activities. It means healthy technology use, as well as ethical technology use. According to Digital Respons-Ability (2020), "digital citizenship" is a broad term that encompasses a variety of topics, such as maintaining one's online health, participating in civic and political activities online, maintaining one's online safety, having effective communication, and media literacy. It includes everything a person needs to know to perform responsibly in a world where technology is pervasive. As a way of understanding the complexity of digital citizenship and the issues of technology use, abuse, and misuse, Ribble, (2020) opined that the idea of digital citizenship came about because people will need to behave responsibly and respectfully as good citizens since there will be more online activities. Ribble (2020), also asserted that many students utilize technology and might not be aware of certain behaviours that should be encouraged or discouraged. He further proposed the Digital citizenship framework for educators to follow to encourage digital citizenship behaviour in the classroom. The framework, as shown in the figure below divides digital citizenship into three broad aspects which are further divided into nine elements.

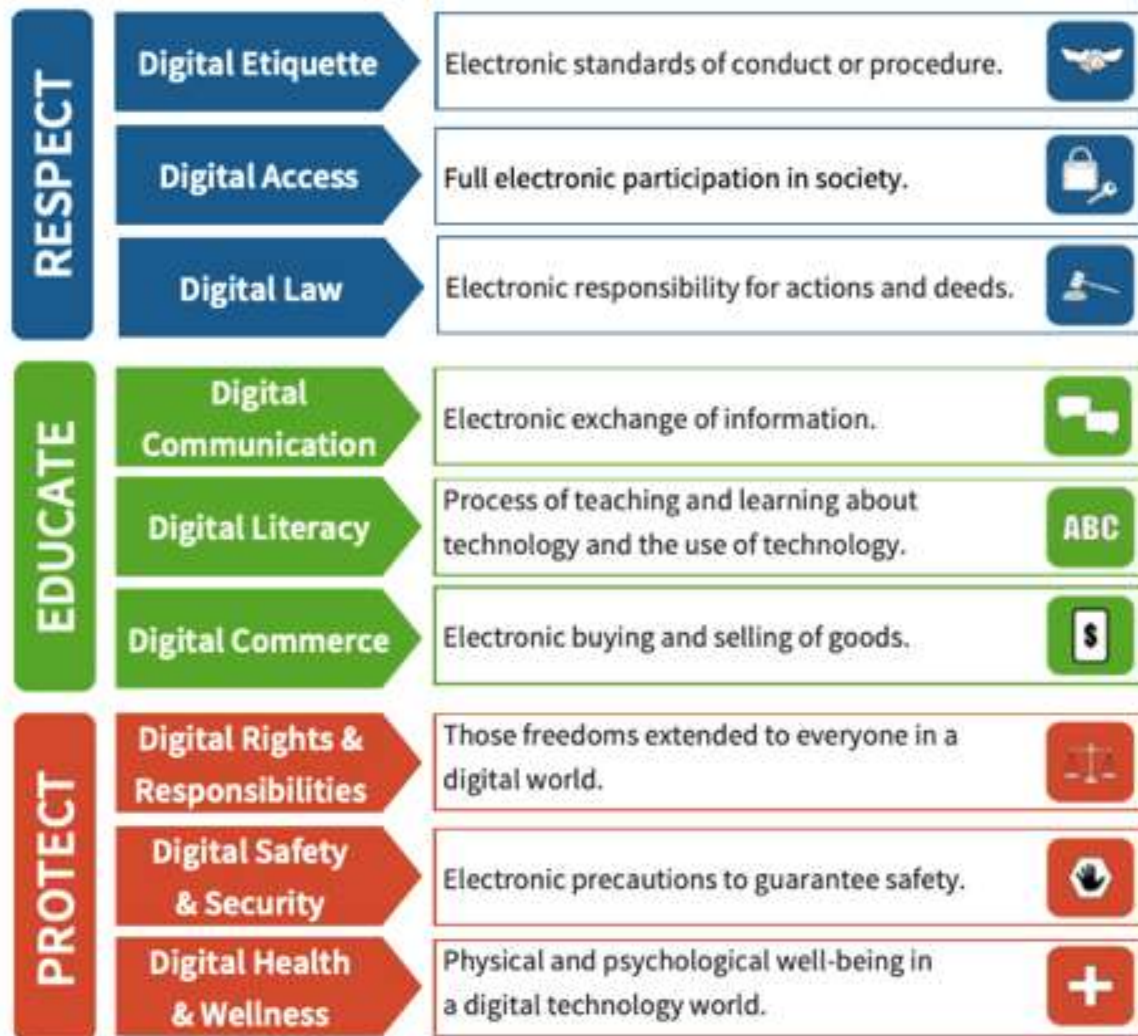


Figure 1: Nine Elements of Digital Citizenship (Source: Adapted from <https://edusites.uregina.ca/missdayman/am-i-a-digital-citizen/>)

Concept of Digital Citizenship Behaviour

Digital citizenship behaviour refers to the standards of proper conduct when using technology (ISTE, 2022). In order to practise forms of social involvement that are respectful of human rights and dignity through responsible use of technology, digital citizenship requires the capacity to engage constructively, critically, and skilfully in the digital environment. The structure depicted in figure 2 can be used to illustrate digital citizenship in more detail. According to this framework, there are three main categories of digital citizenship components. As follows:

- educate yourself and others,
- respect yourself and others
- protect yourself and others

Ribble (2020) divided digital behaviour into three categories in order to adequately define digital citizenship behaviour: Treat others with respect, educate yourself and others, and safeguard yourself and others. Maintaining a secure online environment for instruction and learning is the responsibility of both teachers and students (Philips & Lee, 2019). Therefore, educators must understand how to instruct students on how to respect, inform, and defend themselves when using digital technologies. According to Ribble, respecting oneself and others means following digital law, digital etiquette, and access to the internet. Digital commerce, digital communication, and digital literacy are all parts of educating oneself and others. Digital Rights and Responsibilities, Digital Health and Wellness, and Digital Security are all parts of protecting oneself and others online.



Furthermore, according to the Council of Europe (2019) in figure 2 there are ten digital domains underpinning the overall concept of digital citizenship. These are divided into three areas namely: Being Online, Well-Being Online and Rights Online.

Being Online: This considers Access and Inclusion, Learning and Creativity as well as Media and Information Literacy.

Well-Being Online: Refers to Ethics and Empathy, Health and Well-being as well as e-Presence and Communication as the central focus of this category.

Rights Online: This sector of digital citizenship domain considers Active Participation, Rights and Responsibilities, Privacy and Security as well as Consumer Awareness.

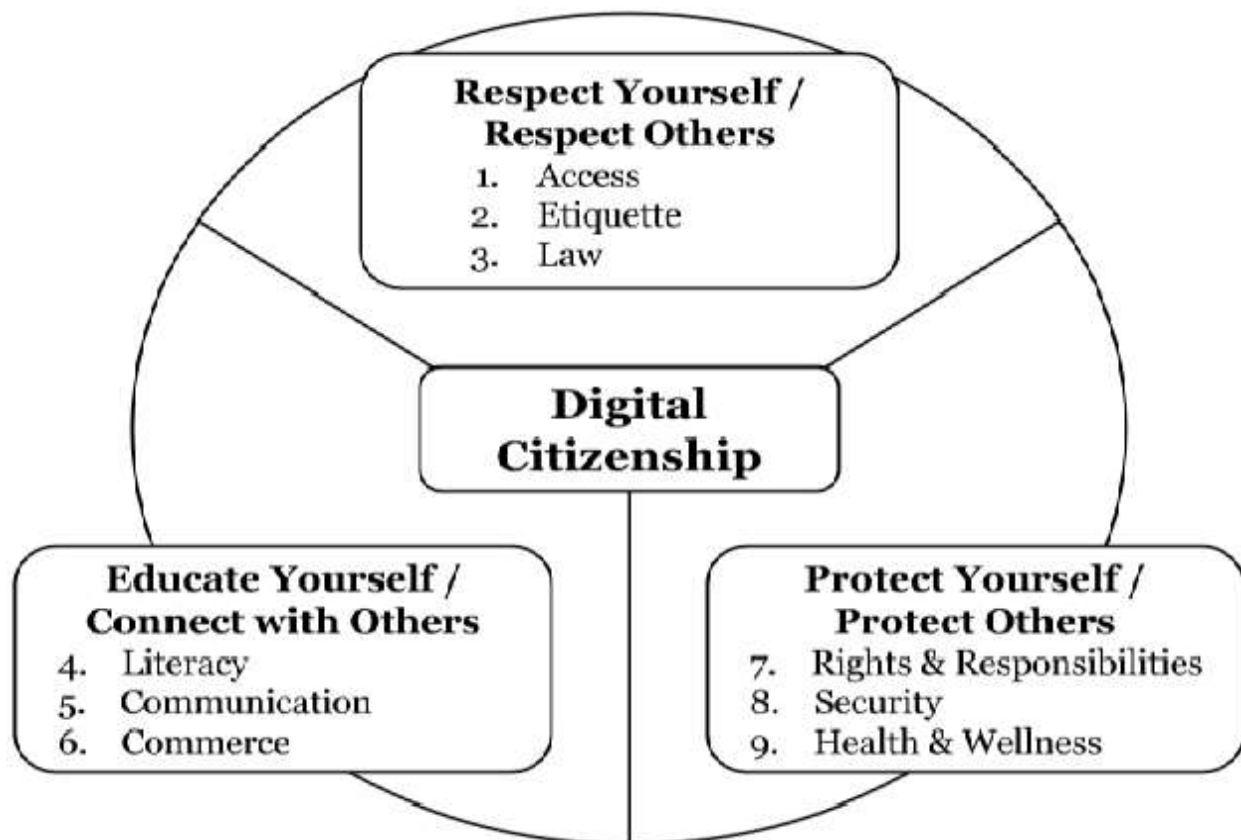


Figure 2 Digital Citizenship Framework (Source: Adapted from https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-three-dimensions-of-digital-citizenship-As-shown-in-Fig1-Ribble-and-Miller-17_fig1_319053548)

Need for Digital Citizenship Education in Nigerian Secondary and Tertiary Institutions

Digital citizenship has become a priority for societies that see technology integration as a major teaching and learning strategy for preparing students to live and work in the 21st century. The concept aims to prepare students, who are new or immature in the digital world in which they live, for a society using technology. According to Ribble and Bailey (2007), the concept of digital citizenship is gained from an early age. For this reason, citizenship education should evolve to suit the needs of young citizens and the social, political and communication worlds they live in (Bennet, Wells & Rank, 2009). The COVID-19 pandemic that struck various parts of the world had an impact in the form of changes in various sectors of life, including the education sector. With the COVID-19 pandemic, learning that was originally always carried out face-to-face was transitioned online meaning that very young learners must use the internet and other digital tools to continue their learning. Also, the demand for higher education driven by technological innovation is expanding exponentially throughout the world and thousands of young people in Nigeria seeking higher education. E-learning has proved to be a viable option, especially in higher education though it is not a new phenomenon in promoting education in



some parts of the world. Presently, some institutions in Nigeria are using it to promote distance education and lifelong learning. According to Ayodele (2010), many developed nations of the world have in recent times, applied the use of e-learning which means the use of wireless electronic technology to deliver and receive knowledge and skill. However, Nigerian secondary and tertiary institutions can be said to be behind in the adaptation of these technologies as there is evidently an extremely low rate of diffusion of e-learning and as a consequence, a low rate of usage. There is also the concern of students having the analytical abilities they need to analyse, comprehend, and interpret material from the internet, which is extremely harmful. In addition to optimizing learning in the pandemic era, the application of the concept of digital citizenship through online learning is due to the increasing moral degradation in the use of technology. This is confirmed by the findings from different studies that the behaviour patterns of children and adolescents in using the internet tend to provide their personal information on digital media, a large number of students and adolescents in Nigeria are exposed to pornographic content, intentionally or unintentionally, lack of parental supervision of digital activities. What students do also encourage "deviations" in internet use, bullying behaviour, and the ease of issuing swear words on social media pages on the internet. Some scholars have asserted that poor online behaviour, such as cyberbullying or harassment, maybe an individual's way of escalating their popularity or seeking validation by making others feel weaker or victimized (Farmer, 2011). When students do not receive education about how to interact with others, online or in person, they lack the capacity to relate to others, especially those with differing ideas, cultures, or belief systems, and they do not develop a moral or ethical code based on respect and understanding (Snyder, 2016). Therefore, unguided technology use in educational institutions may result in a lowered moral compass and a higher rate of negative interactions between humans. Therefore, in view of this, the implementation of digital citizenship education in secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria is one of which is oriented towards the ability of students to use technology responsibly this is because digital citizenship is not solely a list of behaviour for using technology, but instead is a concept that impacts all students, teachers, parents, school and community leaders, and the greater world by establishing norms or codes of behaviour for how individuals learn to get along in an increasingly connected world.

CONCLUSION

Young people have been reliant on the internet, computers and other digital technologies for learning and communication in recent times but it seems that policymakers in education rely on parents more than curricula for raising awareness among students regarding the use of technology. Based on the scholarly literature reviewed in this paper, it is significant to merge efforts between secondary schools and universities to bridge the gap between technologies as a life tool and as an academic proper usage. Thus, this paper sheds light on the education of young learners on the concept of citizenship and how to use technologies appropriately.

SUGGESTIONS

In this paper, an overview of digital citizenship education in secondary and tertiary institutions was the focus and the following suggestions were put forward:

1. Awareness training and orientation should be periodically organized for students and teachers on the concept of digital citizenship and the safe use of technology.
2. Education policymakers in Nigeria should restructure the existing curricula to include technology-based practices to enhance students' technological expertise and facilitate the appropriate use of technology as an effective learning tool.
3. Massive computer training for all teachers and students should be organized by the government nationwide through in-service training of workshops and conferences.

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