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Digital competency in nutrition education – an educator’s perspective

S. O’Donovan¹, S. Scully¹, A. Donnellan¹ and L. Ryan¹

¹Department of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition, Atlantic Technological University, Galway, Ireland

Digital competency is defined as “the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society”⁽¹⁾. Digital competence is an essential skill required in today’s modern society and has become a highly desired skill in employment. The digitalisation of education has broadened the student skillset deemed necessary to being a well-rounded professional⁽²⁾. Yet little is known on how digital competency is currently taught or assessed in nutrition science education. The aim of this study was to assess the extent to which Irish nutrition science educators conceptualise digital competence and how digital competency education is integrated into nutrition science teaching and learning.

Two semi-structured focus groups with 15 nutrition science educators from three undergraduate nutrition science programmes in Ireland were conducted. Participants completed a baseline digital competency assessment using the MyDigiSkills⁽³⁾ tool, testing five areas of competence. Focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide focusing on questions around digital competency, digital skill requirements, teaching and learning digitally, training and upskilling opportunities, and future digital competency education. Focus groups were transcribed and a content analysis conducted whereby the data were coded, categorised and discussed by all authors.

The digital competency assessment tool highlighted higher levels of competence for ‘Information and Data Literacy’ and ‘Communication and Collaboration’ and lower levels of competence for ‘Digital Content Creation’, ‘Safety’, and ‘Problem Solving’. A clear difference was seen between focus group discussions with one focused on a more traditional approach and the other a more modern innovative approach. Participants reported using multiple ways to teach digital competency through presentations, podcasts, development of professional social media accounts, e-portfolios, Twitter chats, blog sessions, media diaries, and recipe analysis tools. Internal and external training opportunities to learn about and develop digital literacy and skills were identified across both groups and barriers to embracing those opportunities highlighted – funding, protection of time, equipment.

This study highlights that digital competency is becoming an important aspect of nutrition science education and educators agreed digital skills are important to teach and ensure graduates can meet the expectation of today’s modern workforce. Educators’ opportunities to upskill and learn about digital competency should focus on improving competence in areas of ‘Content Creation’, ‘Safety’ and ‘Problem Solving’. Improving nutrition educators’ digital competency levels will enhance digital teaching and learning for future students. Funding was reported as a major barrier to improving digital skills causing delays with accessing innovative tools to enhance teaching and learning practices, limiting training days, updated software, and new equipment. These flexible courses help educators understand new technology and update their skills. Future research should focus on removing these barriers for educators upskilling and providing more support for embracing digital innovations in education.

References

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