



**INTEGRATING INTERNET SAFETY TOPICS INTO EFL
CLASSROOMS: DEVELOPING DIGITAL AWARENESS AND CRITICAL
THINKING SKILLS**

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Abstract: *The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly increased students' exposure to online environments, making internet safety education an essential component of modern schooling. This study investigates the integration of internet safety topics into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and examines its impact on students' digital awareness and critical thinking skills. Using a case study approach, the research was conducted with secondary school students through topic-based English lessons focusing on real-life online situations, discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks. Data were collected through classroom observations, students' written assignments, and feedback questionnaires. The findings indicate that integrating internet safety into EFL lessons not only enhances learners' language skills but also improves their ability to evaluate online information critically and adopt responsible online behavior. The study emphasizes the importance of combining language education with digital literacy to meet the demands of contemporary education.*



Keywords: *Internet safety; EFL classroom; digital literacy; critical thinking; secondary education*

1. Introduction

In the digital age, students are increasingly engaged with the internet for communication, education, and entertainment. While online platforms offer numerous learning opportunities, they also expose students to risks such as cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy violations, and inappropriate content. As a result, internet safety education has become a global educational priority.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms provide an effective platform for addressing real-life issues through meaningful communication. Integrating internet safety topics into EFL lessons allows learners to develop language skills while simultaneously gaining essential digital awareness. Topic-based instruction encourages discussion, critical thinking, and problem-solving, which are crucial skills for both language learning and responsible internet use.

The purpose of this study is to explore how internet safety topics can be effectively integrated into EFL classrooms and to examine their impact on students' digital awareness and critical thinking skills. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does teaching internet safety through EFL lessons influence students' digital awareness?
2. What effect does this integration have on learners' critical thinking and communication skills?

2. Literature Review

Digital literacy is commonly defined as the ability to access, evaluate, and use digital information responsibly (Gilster, 1997). Recent studies emphasize that digital literacy education should begin at the secondary school level to prepare learners for safe online participation.



Internet safety education focuses on protecting learners from online risks and promoting ethical digital behavior. According to Livingstone and Smith (2014), schools play a critical role in developing students' awareness of online safety issues.

In EFL education, content-based and topic-based instruction have been widely recognized as effective approaches for promoting meaningful language use. Research by Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) suggests that integrating real-world content into language lessons enhances learner motivation and critical thinking skills.

Despite increasing interest in digital education, limited research has explored the integration of internet safety topics specifically within EFL classrooms. This study addresses this gap by examining the pedagogical value of combining language learning with internet safety education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of students' responses to internet safety instruction within EFL lessons.

3.2 Participants

The participants were secondary school EFL learners aged 15–17. The students had intermediate to lower-intermediate English proficiency and regular access to the internet for academic and personal purposes.

3.3 Instructional Procedure

The teaching intervention was conducted over a four-week period. Internet safety topics were integrated into regular EFL lessons through:

- Reading texts related to online safety
- Group discussions and debates
- Role-plays based on online scenarios
- Writing tasks such as advice posts and short essays

The lessons encouraged learners to express opinions, analyze situations, and propose solutions in English.



3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through:

- Classroom observations
- Students' written assignments
- Feedback questionnaires

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to digital awareness, critical thinking, and language use.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that students demonstrated increased awareness of internet safety issues, including privacy protection, safe communication, and critical evaluation of online information. Classroom discussions revealed that learners became more cautious and reflective about their online behavior.

Students' written tasks showed improvement in their ability to express opinions, provide arguments, and suggest solutions in English. The integration of real-life internet safety scenarios encouraged meaningful communication and critical thinking.

These results support previous studies suggesting that content-based instruction enhances both language learning and cognitive skills (Coyle et al., 2010). Integrating internet safety topics into EFL classrooms creates a dual benefit by addressing language objectives and essential life skills simultaneously.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the integration of internet safety topics into EFL classrooms and examined its impact on students' digital awareness and critical thinking skills. The findings suggest that topic-based EFL instruction focusing on internet safety can effectively promote responsible digital behavior while enhancing language skills.

The study recommends that EFL teachers incorporate digital literacy topics into their curriculum to make lessons more relevant and meaningful. Although the



research was limited to a small-scale case study, it provides valuable pedagogical insights.

Future research could investigate the long-term impact of internet safety education in EFL contexts or compare different instructional approaches. Overall, the study highlights the importance of interdisciplinary teaching in modern education.

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