

MAPPING THE GAPS IN GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' DIGITAL COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT

The present study is a part of a large-scale survey and analysis of the actual state of digitalization in Bulgarian education, conducted within the framework of project SUMMIT BG-RRP-2.004-0008, funded by the EU through NextGenerationEU. The primary aim of the Project is to determine the level, developmental potential, and existing gaps in the digital competences of Bulgarian teachers, whose role is crucial in preparing contemporary generations living in the digital era. In this context, the study examines the outcomes of implementing the SELFIE self-assessment tool for teachers' digital competences in geography within the Bulgarian educational environment, using its most recent 2023 revised version, updated in line with the enhancements outlined in the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027). The research builds on evidence from the authors' earlier studies, which draw on two datasets: Bulgarian teachers ($n = 396$) and teacher educators ($n = 96$). It introduces a straightforward procedure based on several criteria for identifying gaps in digital competences, specifically among geography teachers, across the instrument's six subscales. The central research question is: Across which dimensions and domains of the DigCompEdu framework are the most significant deficits among geography teachers observed? To address this question, the study employs an author-developed, criterion-based mapping strategy that incorporates descriptive and cross-tab analyses of the data, while also accounting for the subject-specific characteristics of geography teaching.

The self-reflected deficits identified in the study indirectly confirm three key assumptions. First, the development of students' digital competences in Bulgaria remains "enclosed" within the field of subject-specific ICT education and is not cultivated as a broad interdisciplinary theme that also encompasses geography education. Second, the findings validate the relatively high proportion of geography teachers who lack confidence in their ability to contribute and to support the development of their students' digital competences. Third, in the long term, the limited scope and insufficient level of digital competences among geography teachers in Area 6 are expected to inevitably affect their students' school preparation, leading to lower levels or potential deficits in overall digital competence.

Keywords: DigComEdu, geography teachers, self-assessment, gaps in digital pedagogical competence, needs for improving competences

INTRODUCTION

In the broader European context, the decade between 2010 and 2020 is marked by the prioritization of digital competence for all European citizens and educational stakeholders as a key factor in accelerating the digital transformation of the social and