



- South EU Google Data Governance Chair Op-Eds -

**DIGITAL EDUCATION: STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT**

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## DIGITAL EDUCATION<sup>2</sup>: STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

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**Abstract:** We live in an undeniable digital age, where connection and technology permeate every aspect of our lives. Children, often referred to as "digital natives," are growing up in this virtual ecosystem. However, simply being born in the digital era does not automatically make them proficient or safe in this environment. This op-eds highlights the importance of digital education, emphasizing digital literacy in particular, as the key to preparing children not only to interact but also to thrive with integrity and safety in this interconnected world.

**Keywords:** Digital Literacy; Education; Children; Digital Natives; Online Security.

**Summary:** 1. Digital literacy as the language of the contemporary era: deciphering, discerning, and interacting. 2. The relevance of traditional literacy in the early years of education and its interaction with the digital realm. 3. The collective responsibility of educators, parents, and policymakers in promoting and prioritizing digital literacy.

## **1. DIGITAL LITERACY AS THE LANGUAGE OF THE CONTEMPORARY ERA**

While the virtual environment offers learning and growth opportunities, it also presents significant challenges. It is necessary to enhance learning, as well as to expand opportunities for a formation grounded in human values.<sup>3</sup> Proper protection is not limited only to legislation, but also to empowerment through education.<sup>4</sup>

Currently<sup>5</sup>, Children represent a large number of online users.<sup>6</sup> And, therefore, the relationship between children and digital technologies – from internet use to social networks and games – is often met with scrutiny and concern<sup>7</sup>.

In this regard, digital literacy is the language of the contemporary era, as it refers to an individual's ability to interact with digital content, often embedded in a hypertextual web that uses multiple forms of expression.<sup>8</sup>

It's important to mention that this structure is non-linear (...) the texts are interconnected through links, directing to other multimodal content.<sup>9</sup> Given this, digital ability is not limited only to technique, but to knowledge, skills, and attitudes that empower children to navigate safely and competently in an increasingly digitalized environment (...) and in this environment, literacy changes.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. THE RELEVANCE OF TRADITIONAL LITERACY IN THE EARLY YEARS OF EDUCATION AND ITS INTERACTION WITH THE DIGITAL REALM**

Beyond its traditional definition that involves the skills to read, write, and calculate, literacy is currently seen as a tool to recognize, understand, interpret, create, and communicate in a predominantly digital world, mediated by texts and in constant evolution.<sup>11</sup>

This classical formation, even in the early years of education, converges with the digital world. Successful integration of both is vital to prepare digital natives for an interconnected and dynamic world. Digital culture, due to its fluidity and adaptability, requires that government policies observe how children and young people are trained to navigate these emerging and ever-changing scenarios.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, it is crucial to consider the impacts of emerging information and communication technologies in children's daily lives. These modern technologies, characterized by their speed, vast storage capacity, and ability to reproduce texts, videos, and audios through apps and with AI support, bring challenges. Amidst profound inequalities and weak protection rules, it is vital to ensure children's safe inclusion in this digital world.<sup>13</sup>

## **3. THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF EDUCATORS<sup>14</sup>, PARENTS<sup>15</sup>, AND POLICYMAKERS<sup>16</sup> IN PROMOTING AND PRIORITIZING DIGITAL LITERACY**

With the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing digitalization of many aspects of daily life, it has become crucial for families to be equipped to navigate the digital world safely and informedly.<sup>17</sup>

However, the lack of restrictions and care can expose children to risks<sup>18</sup> serious to their physical and psychological integrity. This duality challenges the laws and public policies aimed at digital access in early childhood.

In conclusion, it is not the intention to overlook the considerable advancements that can arise from technological progress and its social impacts on the lives of children who are actively online. The use of the digital space can enhance skill development and open doors to countless opportunities. However, for this, it becomes crucial to adopt a perspective centered on children's rights, which means not only protecting them from possible dangers inherent in the digital world but also ensuring they have equitable opportunities to enjoy its benefits.<sup>19</sup>



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### **About the South EU Google Data Governance Chair:**

Last June 24th, 2021, the launch and the beginning of the activities of the South EU Google Data Governance Chair took place.

The Board is headed by Professor José Luis Piñar (CEU-San Pablo University, Madrid) and counts with Professors Maria da Graça Canto Moniz (Nova University Lisbon), Georgios Yannopoulos (University of Athens) and Vincenzo Zencovich (University of RomaTre).

The Chair will focus on scientific reflection and research in the academic field on data governance, in the context of the European countries.

In addition, it will serve as a framework to analyze the challenges for Law and Data Governance in the European sphere, in areas such as Big Data, Data Driven Innovation, Artificial Intelligence or International Personal Data flows.

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