



Critical Digital Citizenship: Its Understanding and Implication in Education

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In the age of digitalization and high-speed internet access, digital citizenship is gaining ground focussing online behaviour and appropriate usage of technology. However, digital citizenship does not address the issues like justice, equity and accessibility in digital and internet learning. This paper explores the conceptual clarity of critical digital citizenship (CDC) and its significance in educating students for a post-digital, inclusive, and egalitarian society. The discussion highlights the urgency of critical digital citizenship in school education, particularly for the younger generation, who are digital natives. Through a systematic review, the researcher emphasises the crucial importance of incorporating CDC into the school curriculum. The study results give meaning of CDC, a theoretical and practical foundation for teaching CDC in classroom.

Keywords: *Critical Digital Citizenship, School Education.*



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1. Introduction

Internet and digital technologies have significantly altered changed people's lives in numerous ways, including habits, views, and relationships. (Puthur et al., 2023). High-speed internet, cell phones, tablets, and PCs have made permeated sector (Hassan & Mirza, 2021). In the age of aggressive implementations of digital technology, the information being transmitted frequently through digitized tools, could have both positive and negative effects on the lives of people. In a world immersed in digital technology and

internet, individual must learn how to safeguard their privacy, combat cyberbullying, identify fake news, communicate respectfully and look at the digital content critically (Prasetyo et al., 2021). People across the globe are becoming more aware of things like cyber ethics, intellectual property, online privacy, and proper behaviour on the internet.

This article explores on teaching and learning critical digital citizenship (CDC) to students which is of great importance (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022). In a world immersed in

digital technology and internet, children must learn how to safeguard their privacy, combat cyberbullying, identify fake news, communicate respectfully and look at the digital content critically (Prasetyo et al., 2021). As educators, we must focus on teaching the younger generation not only about appropriate online behaviour, digital rights and responsibilities but also how to evaluate online culture. There is greater urgency to make the future policy makers regarding digital divide and digital equity. By instilling the principles of critical digital citizenship, we educate students on how to grow responsibly and critically in the digital age (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022). Critical Digital Citizenship (CDC) education prepares students for digital related values and equips them to be responsible, ethical, and well-informed online citizens who contribute positively to the digital world. Accordingly, the proposed aim of this research is to study the content and significance of critical digital citizenship.

Since more and more communication is done through high-speed internet and digital tools. People are more and more using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, twitter and so on (Arisoy, 2022). The number of people utilising digital devices is growing at an exponential rate. Individuals must learn more about digital citizenship, which is concerned with appropriate and responsible behaviour when using the internet and digital technologies. Digital platform is playing a significant role in every aspect of human life. The concern regarding cyber security is growing among many individuals. Learning of critical digital citizenship skills may to know how to be safe, respect and participate meaningfully in online culture help individuals in online safety and protection (Arisoy, 2022). Educational policies time and again emphasize on technological integration and online ethical behaviour. Therefore, in future use of digital tools in educational set up play a prominent role. It is high time that young and old alike learn best practices in the online media. CDC skill and knowledge will not only help to actively participate in online communities but also will help individuals to critically evaluate online content and protection.

Critical Digital Citizenship combines the concepts of Digital Citizenship and Critical Pedagogy (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022). Digital citizenship can be divided into two groups: (i)

traditional digital citizenship, and (ii) the critical digital citizenship that exists in the digital world. A traditional view of digital citizenship explains how one has to behave appropriately in online environment. The discussion under critical digital citizenship will be based on the proponents of critical Pedagogy like Freire, Kincheloe, Giroux. Critical Pedagogy encourages students to use their experiences to participate in democracy ethically. It links learning and education to life through fairness, equity, and social justice. Critical pedagogy addresses student experiences and power and inequality structures. It seeks transformative education that addresses wider causes and structures that cause oppression and marginalization (Bradshaw, 2017). Paulo Freire an important figure in critical pedagogy, popularized the concept of Critical Consciousness, which helps pupils distinguish between their own interests and those of dominating class (Freire Paulo, 2005). It also addresses the importance of CDC in addressing the issues of equity, justice, and technological bias. By exploring this background, this research aims to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for CDC that will be useful to students, educators, administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders in school education.

2. Methodology

This article uses a qualitative research methodology by reviewing articles that have been published in peer-reviewed journals. It is descriptive in nature so that it clarifies the concept of critical digital citizenship. The main objective of the study is to ascertain the significance of CDC for students so that they are prepared to become respectable and responsible in the post-digital era who can contribute to the creation of a just society.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Citizenship and Education

For educators, the topic of citizenship is very important. Adding a sense of citizenship to school instruction has been an important, but sometimes controversial, problem in education for almost one hundred years (Fallace, 2009; Longstreet, 1985). John Dewey directly talked about "civic efficiency" or "good citizenship" based on experience and political and social involvement in one's community as one of the main goals of education in his 1916 book Democracy and

Education. Because citizenship is such an important part of social studies, it is important to know how the idea of citizenship is defined and updated in the modern world (Choi, 2016).

The comprehension and examination of digital citizenship can undoubtedly gain from the body of knowledge on civic education, since these two concepts are intricately interconnected. An example of the interconnectedness between education and politics can be seen in the taxonomy of citizenship proposed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), which highlights the relationship between citizenship development and schooling.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) framework categorize citizenship into three types: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. These categories align with theoretical perspectives and differ in educators' democratic educational aims. Programs promoting justice-oriented citizens may not necessarily promote personal responsibility and participatory citizenship. Programs for developing personally responsible citizens focus on character building, honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and compassion. Programs for promoting participatory citizens involve active participation in civic affairs and social life. Justice-oriented citizens understand social, economic, and political forces and focus on collective work and structural critique. Programs promoting justice-oriented citizens engage students in informed analysis and discussion, encouraging collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and address root causes of problems.

4. Digital Citizenship Vs Critical Digital Citizenship

4.1. Digital Citizenship

In the past, Digital Citizenship discussion was mostly around the student's online safety. That concept is changed over the last twenty years. People are becoming more aware of things like cyber ethics, intellectual property, online privacy, and proper behaviour on the internet. The "Nine Elements of Digital Citizenship" were created by Ribble (2007) has gained significant importance in modern education as a result of the widespread use of technology. Ribble highlights the imperative nature of instructing digital citizenship, enumerating its components, and justifying its incorporation into the educational

curriculum. Ribble's groundbreaking study outlines nine fundamental elements of digital citizenship, emphasising the critical need to build secure and ethical online communication and collaboration. Digital citizenship is now a shared responsibility among educators, which emphasizes how crucial it is for schools to incorporate the teaching-learning process into the ethical use of technology by teachers, students, and administrators. The misuse and abuse of digital technology in school and daily life have reached significant levels. One way of addressing this issue is that digital citizenship permeates the school curriculum, not becoming a standalone class but an integral part of the education system. (Ribble & Bailey, 2007).

Ribble, M., & Bailey, G. (2007) referred Digital citizenship as the responsible use of technology, particularly the internet and digital devices, by individuals and communities. Digital citizenship, also often defined as the ability to participate in society online (Gu et al., 2023). This concept is based on two components namely competence and participation. The competence aspect of digital citizenship emphasizes individuals' online skills, enabling them to use technology and the internet for social, cultural, and economic engagement (Gu et al., 2023). It encompasses a wide range of behaviours, practices and principles that guide how people conduct themselves in the digital world. Digital citizenship education aims to equip individuals, especially students, with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the digital world responsibly and ethically. It emphasizes the importance of promoting a positive online culture, respecting others' rights and opinions, and contributing to a safer and more inclusive digital society. Ribble and Bailey (2007) define 9 dimensions related to the concept of digital citizenship. In these definitions, it is seen that emphasis is placed on competence (skills) and ethical rules in digital environments. According to Ribble (2014), the main themes of digital citizenship are respect, educate, and protect. The elements in each theme are show in table 1.

Table 1: Themes and elements of digital citizenship

Themes	Elements of digital citizenship
Respect	Etiquette: electronic standards of conduct and behaviour
	Digital Access: full electronic participation in society
	Digital Law: digital users' responsibility for actions and deeds
	Communication: information exchange in digital environment
Educate	Literacy: knowledge and skills on when and how to use technology
	Commerce: the buying and selling of goods online
	Rights and Responsibility: the privileges and freedoms for digital citizens
Protect	Safety: precautions to ensure in digital media
	Health and Welfare: physical and psychological well-being in digital users

Hollandsworth (2011) explains various dimensions of digital citizenship and their impact on educational development. Lack of awareness and knowledge about digital citizenship is seen as a major cause of behavioural problems among students. If these problems are not addressed with appropriate long-term solutions in school education, there is a higher risk. Based on various research papers, this article provides the best practical guidance for professionals who want to promote digital citizenship among learners. As more and more students have access to the Internet, the question arises: Who is responsible for guiding students to use online technologies safely. Digital society must be able to make the right decisions when it comes to online safety, behaviour, protection, digital access and technology-related health risks. Several scholars emphasize the importance of integrating digital citizenship into school curriculum. This could be achieved through the collective efforts of parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers and technical professionals (**Hollandsworth et al., 2011**).

Social media platforms have increased political, social and civic engagement in promoting digital citizenship. Social media platforms support the development of digital citizenship among students and pave the way for a revolutionary human being with knowledge and skills. Digital citizenship includes the competence to use digital technology to actively participate in social discourse, communicate with others and create content. Digital citizenship is a guiding principle for personal and academic activities and requires

behaviour in the ethical and responsible use of digital tools. Digital citizenship is transforming young people's knowledge and ideas and offering new opportunities for global citizenship, civic participation and engagement. (**Chukwuere & Munapo, 2023**).

While many research scholars has concentrated on these competence-based models. There are few studies which focus on the participation view of digital citizenship. This perspective connects digital citizenship to economic, social, or political participation in the online world. It considers social and political rights and possibilities including digital access, literacy, civic engagement providing a more contextual and culturally sensitive framework for digital citizenship (**Gu et al., 2023**).

The implications of digital citizenship in education have been elucidated by **Capuno (2022)**. One aspect of this is teaching students how to be safe and respectful in the digital world. Many schools have embraced digitalization in their teaching and learning management processes since the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this process, educators and students have become digital citizens. (**Capuno et al., 2022**). Furthermore, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) includes concepts of digital citizenship in its standards for the responsible and ethical use of technology for educators, students and administrators (**ISTE, 2017**).

While speaking about digital citizenship, **Prensky (2001)** mentions two types of digital citizenship namely: Digital native and digital

immigrants. The coining of the word "digital native" is generally attributed to [Prensky \(2001\)](#) and [Tapscott \(1998\)](#) during the late 1990s. The term "digital natives" refers to people who were born between 1980 and 1994, as they are the first generation to have grown up with contemporary technology ([Elaoufy, 2023](#)). A digital native is someone who grew up with technology and can share information, interact, and connect to others through digital media continuously. They are well versed in internet knowledge and skills because they grew up in the atmosphere of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, podcasts, YouTube, online news, text messaging, instant messaging, smart phones, iPads, and many other things. Adults who were born in the digital era are often called generation X. This generation is also known as the "iGeneration" or as having "digital DNA" from birth ([Barbuceanu, 2020](#)). The "digital immigrants" are people who learn how to use technology after they are teenagers. Though they may get used to digital tools over time, it is clear that they are not digital natives because of how they use them. When they need information, they look at written materials instead of the internet and don't usually use technology ([Cimen, 2021](#)). According to [Wang, Myers, and Sundaram \(2013\)](#) said that digital "immigrants" are adults who learned how to use computers later in life. These people probably don't like new technology or have a hard time getting used to it ([Wang, 2012](#)).

4.2. Understanding critical digital citizenship

The concepts CDC are mainly influenced by the critical pedagogical approaches to education, which have been contributed by a wide range of scholars. "Critical Pedagogy" is a term first coined by Henry Giroux and then expanded upon by Freire and other critical educators, is a potent educational philosophy. Critical pedagogy, is a democratic educational approach that promotes questioning, equity, justice, and critical thinking. It aims to empower students to contribute to societal change and fosters an inclusive, equitable environment. Critical pedagogy encourages justice and critical introspection, fostering responsible societal members. It criticizes dominant assumptions that reduce students to passive recipients and addresses issues of fairness and power dynamics in the classroom. By challenging

cultural norms and assumptions, critical pedagogy aims to create an inclusive, participatory, and democratic learning environment, bridging the gap between theory and practice ([ON CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, 2011](#)).

Critical pedagogy promotes social justice and equality by raising awareness of privileged classes and empowering all students. It focuses on understanding and using knowledge, recognizing that knowledge is a site of contestation and conflict. For [Freire \(1970\)](#) critical pedagogy is learner centred education. He categorized banking education and problem-posing education. In the traditional model, teachers are knowledgeable and students are passive, passively following their teacher's instructions. This model encourages a passive attitude towards societal problems and inequalities. On the other hand, problem-posing education fosters critical thinking and critical thinking by allowing students to see the world as constantly changing. This approach makes students aware of problems, prepares them for bigger issues, and empowers them to voice their concerns against injustice. The goal of school is not to learn facts but to foster critical consciousness, enabling students to become agents of social transformation ([Freire, 2000](#)).

Additionally, critical digital pedagogy has contributed to the construction of the CDC, which emphasizes equal power-sharing in digital environments and re-examines space, interaction, and learning tools. It emphasizes community, accepting diverse voices, and finding applications beyond traditional school settings. Open, connected learning spaces should not only store information but also foster collaboration between teachers and students. Criticism in the Classroom is a political and educational movement for social justice, making people more human ([Morris & Stommel, 2018](#)).

Digital citizenship does not address the issues like Justice, equity, civic engagement and so on; it often deals appropriate and respectful online behaviour. We need to understand technology through the eyes of critical pedagogy, which helps challenge the status quo and achieve social justice by raising consciousness of systemic barriers that promote oppression. Critical pedagogy encourages understanding how systems and hierarchies of power operate to undervalue the lived experiences, knowledge, language and culture of

oppressed communities (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022). Thus, Critical Digital Citizenship combines the elements of Digital Citizenship and Critical pedagogy principles Friere (1970). The word 'Critical' is understood through Freirean concepts Namely:banking education, student-teacher contradiction, dialogue, and problem-posing (Freire, 2000).

Charles (2022), discusses the concept of "critical digital citizenship," which stresses how technology can change how people participate as citizens and work for justice. It appears that lessons on digital citizenship mostly teach students how to stay safe and behave properly online, without talking about more important issues like justice and political participation. He insists that we should look at technology and civic involvement with a critical eye because technology isn't neutral and can affect civic participation in ways that aren't well understood. Critical pedagogy, which helps question the status quo and achieve social justice by making people more aware of systemic barriers that support oppression, should be used to help people think about digital citizenship through a critical lens, the authors say. Critical education tries to get people to understand how power structures and systems work to devalue the experiences, knowledge, language, and culture of groups that have been historically disadvantaged. (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022).

The Young People's Race, Power, and Technology Project (YPRPT) is an example of a learning experience designed to foster students' critical digital citizenship and encourage them to cultivate justice-oriented civic identities (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022). This project is an example of how young people can participate in politics, and it can help teachers and researchers think about what it means to be a good digital citizen. Critical theory is used in the programme to figure out how digital governance helps young people get past the social limits of race and class. The students' discussions show that they are becoming more politically aware, more aware of other people's feelings, and better at being good internet citizens. The work says that traditional lessons on digital citizenship have trouble dealing with complicated social issues. It says that critical digital citizenship can help make the connections between technology, government, and our lives

fairer. There is also discussion about how technology affects students' digital citizenship. This shows how important inquiry and study design are for dealing with power and injustice in the classroom. The paper also talks about the problems that come up when you try to teach critical digital citizenship. It also stresses the importance of an anticolonial approach to teaching democracy. At the end of the paper, it talks about how important it is to use culturally relevant pedagogy and how technology can help students become good digital citizens (Charles W. Logan et al., 2022).

5. The relevance of CDC in education

This section focuses on the discussion about relevance of CDC in education. Following is its relevance for creating an inclusive society:

The dialogical approaches advocated by Freire are the most effective method to improve students' critical thinking capacity in teaching. It facilitates the mutual exchange of information and engagement between the learner and teacher. CDC promotes the dialogic approach in the digital environment learning. When teachers adopt a dialogic approach, they think that the students' minds are not an empty vessel. Every student brings certain experiences and knowledge with them. So, knowledge is formed through mutual exchange of information and thoughts. It cultivates idea that both the teacher and the student as equal dialogue partners.

Dewey (1902) suggested that there is a basic distinction to be made between the subject matter covered in the curriculum and the experiences that a child has encountered. In an effort to get beyond this limitation, CDC promotes learning that is applicable to actual experiences.

Accessibility is often overlooked in the context of digital innovation. Many times, companies put marketability, usability, and aesthetics ahead of digital inclusion, which causes obstacles to be created for students from lower-income families. Consequently, certain groups may experience marginalisation and find it more difficult to access the basic services and social connections that their communities need. It's probable that this will lead to long-term marginalization and discrimination. In order to incorporate accessibility principles into instruction in a digital setting, school

administrators can benefit from the assistance of the CDC.

CDC is can bring changes in the educational system by fostering critical thinking, curiosity, and inquiry-based learning through the development of interactive learning environments. When this strategy is applied, students are equipped to pose relevant questions, research challenging material, and develop a deeper understanding of the world around them. Generally speaking, using CDC greatly enhances students' capacity to ask questions.

The CDC idea is centred on addressing disparities in access to digital resources and responsible technology use. It recognizes that not everyone has equal access to technology, frequently because of things like geography, socioeconomic status, education level, or physical capabilities. The CDC promotes measures to close the digital divide, including building out broadband infrastructure, offering financial aid, and putting in place initiatives for digital literacy. Additionally, it highlights how crucial inclusivity and accessibility are to digital technology content. This involves making certain that platforms and webpages are made to be usable by people with a variety of needs, including those who are disabled. CDC's main goal is to establish a digital environment in which all individuals can engage actively and completely.

The framework of critical digital citizenship (CDC) provides individuals with guidance in comprehending the purpose, motives, and societal consequences of digital tools. It promotes individuals to scrutinise the originators, intentions, beneficiaries, financial incentives, and societal effects of digital tools. The CDC's primary aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the origins, intended functionality, and equitable distribution of benefits associated with digital tools. Furthermore, it raises inquiries regarding the beneficiaries of digital tools, emphasising the possibility of unfair consequences and the exacerbation of inequality. Finally, the CDC promotes thoughtful examination of the inclusiveness and accessibility of digital technologies, making sure they do not worsen existing disparities or exclude underprivileged people. Through the analysis of these aspects, individuals can actively promote increased openness, accountability, and social responsibility

in the process of designing and implementing. This technique enables users to manage the intricate realm of digital technology with heightened awareness and accountability.

Critical digital citizenship (CDC) offers a vital perspective for analysing the power dynamics present in digital learning environments. It brings attention to important concerns including algorithmic bias, the digital gap, corporate influence, and the reinforcement of dominant cultural norms. Within the domain of digital education, the CDC urges us to carefully examine how algorithms, which are frequently created with inherent biases, influence the availability of educational materials and opportunities. This, in turn, worsens existing inequalities based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status. The CDC underscores the digital gap, emphasising how the unequal access to technology and internet connectivity exacerbates educational disparities, placing marginalised people at a disadvantage. CDC encourages examination of corporate influence in digital learning platforms, where the pursuit of profit may prioritise commercial interests over the effectiveness of teaching and the well-being of students. Furthermore, the CDC emphasises the significance of examining how prevalent cultural norms are reflected and sustained in online learning environments, promoting inclusivity and questioning systematic disparities. CDC enables us to advocate for fair and transformative digital learning environments that prioritise accessibility by comprehending and resolving these power dynamics.

Critical digital citizenship (CDC) is a paradigm for understanding the difficulties of the relationship between business and education. EdTech enterprises use innovative technologies to shape educational practices and pedagogies. However, the CDC highlights concerns about their motivations and the consequences of their impact, including as commercial goals and potential threats like commodification and data abuse. By taking a critical perspective, the CDC empowers educators, students, and stakeholders to engage with the digital realm ethically, encouraging openness and responsible decision-making. This comprehensive understanding of critical digital citizenship unlocks the potential for digitalization

to provide more inclusive, egalitarian, and powerful educational experiences.

Critical digital citizenship (CDC) is a concept that enhances students' awareness of online hazards such as cyberbullying, cyber ethics, protection, and digital security. It urges people to be proactive in preventing and dealing with cyberbullying, while also encouraging empathy and respect. The CDC also emphasises the importance of cyber ethics, advising people to examine the ethical consequences of their conduct. It also teaches people about digital security measures like strong passwords and two-factor authentication, and promotes critical participation with digital platforms. By encouraging openness, accountability, and user rights, the CDC contributes to safer, more inclusive digital environments.

CDC is a global concept that involves students and teachers using digital platforms and technologies to actively participate in social issues and causes. It involves learning about and addressing societal issues through research, education, and awareness campaigns conducted online. As a result, educators and students can become skilled change agents by raising awareness and mobilizing support. Through online activism and the use of platforms like social media campaigns and online petitions, people can increase their influence through practicing digital citizenship. In order to support nonprofit organizations and social movements and help create a more equitable society, cyber volunteers are crucial. Digital citizenship cultivates digital civility, empathy, and respect by enabling people to speak out against abuse. Digital citizenship cultivates empathy, digital literacy, and responsible online behavior, enabling people to make positive changes in their communities and beyond.

6. Conclusion

The significance of critical digital citizenship education in schools is emphasized in this article. It clarifies the meaning of the term "critical digital citizenship," distinguishing it from both "digital citizenship" and traditional citizenship. It also emphasizes the students' involvement in the CDC. Digital citizenship emphasises respecting others, learning, and protecting each other online. CDC adds critical

consciousness to these fundamentals. Critical consciousness entails understanding power dynamics, prejudices, and injustices in digital spaces and society. Critical consciousness helps students question dominant narratives, challenge systemic injustices, and promote social justice. This broader awareness helps students critically analyse digital content, identify and confront bias and discrimination, and actively promote positive change.

Critical digital citizenship (CDC) is essential for improving education and creating a just and responsible society. CDC offers theoretical and practical approaches to integrating critical consciousness into education. CDC principles can help educators create curricula and activities that promote students to consider the ethical, social, and political aspects of digital technology use. Educators can promote critical thinking and empowerment by include talks, projects, and assignments on algorithmic prejudice, digital rights, and online activism. CDC allows educators to implement successful digital citizenship programmes in schools. CDC helps instructors help students navigate the digital world by teaching media literacy, online safety, and responsible digital behaviour. Teachers can improve their digital citizenship and critical thinking abilities through professional development and collaboration with colleagues, benefiting students and society.

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