

BOOK REVIEWS

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Beyond Digitalising the Classroom: A Review of Cassio Santos, Neuza Pedro and Júlio Cabero-Almenara, *e-DigCompEdu*

Santos, Cassio, Neuza Pedro, and Júlio Cabero-Almenara. 2026. *e-DigCompEdu: Marco de Competencias Digitales para la Educación Superior en Línea*. Version 1.0. Editora EducaSimples. ISBN 978-65-01-84049-9.

Digital competence has become one of the most persistent concerns in higher education, particularly since the expansion of online and hybrid teaching and, more recently, the arrival of generative AI. Yet the term often remains imprecise. An academic may be an experienced user of learning-management systems, video-conferencing platforms and generative AI while reproducing online many of the assumptions of face-to-face teaching. Conversely, some practices that make online education effective are strikingly low-tech: clear instructions, predictable structures, accessible materials, intermediate deadlines and meaningful feedback.

This distinction between technological proficiency and digital pedagogy makes *e-DigCompEdu*, by Cassio Santos, Neuza Pedro and Júlio Cabero-Almenara, particularly valuable. The framework extends the European *Digital Competence Framework for Educators* (DigCompEdu) to the specific conditions of online higher education. Its opening discussion distinguishes digital education from online education: all online education is digital, but not all digital education is online, and fully online environments impose particular demands on mediation, interaction, support and student autonomy (pp. 6–14). Transferring an existing practice to a digital platform is not the same as designing it for online learning.

The framework is ambitious. The twenty-two competences of DigCompEdu are retained, twelve additional competences are introduced and the six original areas are expanded to eight. New competences include digital identity and security, online participation, digital curation, online assessment and literacy in digital learning environments. Two new areas address Scientific Digital Literacy and the Management of Online Teaching and Learning (pp. 19–22). The six A1–C2 proficiency levels are also retained. Development involved twenty-two higher-education teachers, documentary mapping and an international Delphi validation with twenty-nine experts in the first round and sixteen in the second (pp. 16–19).

This gives *e-DigCompEdu* more weight than a normative manifesto, although expert consensus about what educators should be able to do does not demonstrate that particular competences necessarily produce better learning outcomes. The framework is therefore strongest as a research-informed map of professional practice: a way of identifying neglected areas and asking better questions about online education.

From my own experience of designing and teaching Ancient History online, one of its strongest features is the refusal to equate student autonomy with the withdrawal of teacher support. Flexibility and self-regulated learning are genuine advantages of online education, especially for students combining study with employment, caring responsibilities or accessibility needs (pp. 7–9). Yet flexibility can also transfer organisational labour from institution to learner. Telling students that they may study “at their own pace” is of limited value if they are simultaneously expected to interpret lengthy instructions, divide assignments into manageable stages and recognise when they need help.

Autonomy is not the absence of structure. It is a capacity that good structure can enable. At the same time, autonomy entails responsibility: accessible instructions cannot substitute indefinitely for reading them, and opportunities for dialogue cannot function if students engage only once assessment has become contentious. This is

where the framework's treatment of self-regulated learning and digital learning environments becomes particularly useful (pp. 32–33, 40–43). In my own teaching, more inclusive assessment has increasingly involved making explicit structures that lecturers often expect students to construct for themselves: planning guides, sequenced instructions, visual summaries, intermediate submissions and tutorial formats that allow difficulties to be addressed before they become crises. A planning guide does not make an assignment intellectually easier; it reduces invisible organisational work surrounding the intellectual task. An intermediate submission similarly allows misunderstanding to be detected while it remains recoverable.

Such measures are especially important from a neurodiversity-informed perspective. Online assessment can easily be designed around an imagined “standard” student who reads linearly, estimates time accurately, initiates tasks without difficulty, tolerates uncertainty and seeks assistance comfortably. *e-DigCompEdu* does not offer a neurodiversity-informed theory of online education, but its emphasis on accessibility and inclusion helps move such questions from exceptional accommodation towards ordinary pedagogical design. Its treatment of assessment is similarly valuable. Area 4 distinguishes simply digitising assessment from designing assessment for online environments, incorporating competences relating to online assessment, security, privacy and ethical conduct (pp. 34–39). A face-to-face examination or assignment can easily be transferred into a virtual platform, but more developed practice requires reconsidering learning outcomes, technological access, instructions, feedback and opportunities for self- or peer assessment. Assessment architecture determines how students distribute effort, when misunderstanding becomes visible and whether there is still time to respond.

The emphasis on accessibility should not, however, encourage the assumption that every difficulty can be solved through better instructional design. Online teaching creates a persistent asymmetry between responsibilities assigned to lecturers and behaviours over which they have limited

control. Students may contest requirements already explained in instructions, interpret feedback differently after receiving a disappointing grade or dispute a correction before consulting the evidence supporting it. None of this removes the obligation to provide clear instructions and meaningful feedback, but neither should every instance of disengagement or dissatisfaction automatically be read as deficient teaching. A mature account of digital competence must preserve responsibility on both sides of the educational relationship.

Online education also generates largely invisible social environments. Students participate not only in institutional platforms but in WhatsApp, Telegram, Discord and other parallel communities in which assignments, feedback and lecturers are continuously interpreted. Such spaces provide valuable mutual support, yet they can also amplify misunderstandings and detach claims from their original context. *e-DigCompEdu*'s attention to online participation and digital identity is therefore welcome, although the framework could have engaged more explicitly with these informal digital publics and with the reputational and emotional labour they generate for teachers.

I would also have welcomed a stronger emphasis on temporality. My own experiments with intermediate submissions have reinforced how different feedback becomes when it arrives while work is still being constructed rather than after it has ceased to be changeable. Feedback on a final submission may explain a grade; feedback on an unfinished argument can alter the argument. It can also establish a pedagogical relationship before grading becomes the dominant lens through which the student interprets the lecturer.

This echoes work developed with Isaías Arrayás Morales in first-year Ancient History (UAB), where students used generative AI and then tested its historical reconstructions systematically against ancient evidence and modern scholarship. The most productive learning occurred when students had to expose an incomplete interpretation to scrutiny and revise it. Inclusive assessment is therefore also about when support

becomes available, not only what support exists.

Generative AI makes these questions more urgent. One strength of *e-DigCompEdu* is that it does not reduce AI to plagiarism or detection. AI appears within questions of security and academic integrity, but also as part of learning, personalised support and Scientific Digital Literacy, which includes AI-assisted academic writing, research, dissemination and data practices (pp. 38–39, 46–53).

In Ancient History teaching, the most useful applications of generative AI may involve making its limitations visible rather than asking it to replace research. A generated reconstruction can become an object of criticism: Which claims can be substantiated? Which modern assumptions have been projected backwards? Whose experiences are absent? What changes when the narrative is compared with ancient evidence and specialist scholarship? Errors can be pedagogically valuable because students must explain *why* they are errors. AI becomes less an oracle than an unstable object upon which disciplinary reasoning can operate.

Here, however, the framework reveals an important tension. Its interest in AI-supported personalisation, learning analytics and automated feedback sits uneasily beside its commitments to accessibility, privacy and ethical conduct (pp. 38–43). Personalisation sounds beneficial until we ask what data are collected, what model of successful participation is encoded and what happens to students whose behaviour diverges from it. From a neurodiversity-informed perspective, apparently anomalous patterns of attention, pacing or communication may have entirely ordinary explanations. Technologies intended to authenticate students or detect suspicious behaviour can therefore convert difference into suspicion.

Digital competence should sometimes consist of deciding not to use a technology. A more advanced teacher is not necessarily the one who collects more data or automates more feedback. Sometimes a clearer rubric, a better sequence of activities or a human conversation is the more competent digital decision.

The framework's new Area 7, Scientific Digital Literacy (pp. 46–53), is nevertheless one of its most distinctive contributions. It incorporates academic writing, management of scientific results, research and selection of scholarly information, dissemination and research-data practices. Area 8 addresses the design and administration of online courses (pp. 54–61). These additions matter because university educators move between overlapping roles as teachers and researchers.

For Ancient Studies, this broader understanding is especially relevant. The discipline already works across digitised texts, archaeological databases, GIS, virtual reconstructions, online museum collections, digital epigraphy and generative AI. Competence cannot simply mean knowing how to operate these resources. It must include understanding how their affordances, limitations and epistemic assumptions shape the questions historians and students are able to ask.

There is also a broader lesson about technological innovation. A sophisticated reconstruction can constitute poor pedagogy if students do not understand what they are meant to learn from it; a generative-AI exercise can remain intellectually empty if its outputs are simply produced and submitted; and an elaborate virtual environment can exclude students if navigation consumes cognitive resources intended for the subject itself. Conversely, modest interventions may have considerable value. A clearly structured visual summary may contribute more to accessibility than another interactive platform, while comparing an AI-generated reconstruction with a primary source may generate more historical reasoning than a technologically impressive immersive environment.

There are limits to what the framework can presently claim. Its development and international expert validation make it substantially more robust than an untested list of recommendations, but the decline from twenty-nine experts in the first Delphi round to sixteen in the second, together with uneven geographical representation, counsels against treating it as a universally settled description of online competence. More importantly, expert validation is not

student validation. Future work should examine how these competences operate in actual courses and how learners themselves evaluate them, particularly in relation to accessibility and AI. “Version 1.0” is therefore an appropriate designation for a framework operating in such a rapidly changing technological environment.

Ultimately, the contribution of *e-DigCompEdu* is not that it tells university teachers which technologies they ought to use. It expands what counts as digital competence. A digitally competent teacher is not simply someone who operates platforms efficiently. Competence involves creating structures through which students can exercise autonomy, designing assessment appropriate to digital environments, identifying barriers to participation, questioning AI, protecting students and data, and deciding whether a technological intervention serves a pedagogical purpose at all.

At the same time, a mature model of online education should resist locating every failure of participation, communication or assessment in the lecturer’s design choices. Digital pedagogy is relational: its success depends upon institutional structures, competent teaching and meaningful student engagement alike.

Perhaps the most useful lesson of *e-DigCompEdu* is therefore also the simplest: genuinely digital education begins not when teaching uses technology, but when educators ask what that technology changes for the learner. I would add one further question: what does the same environment change for the lecturer? Online education expands access and pedagogical possibility, but it also redistributes visibility, responsibility and emotional labour. A framework for online higher-education competence is strongest when it recognises both sides of that transformation.

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Attracting Attendance, Not Policing It: A Review of Patricia Olmos Rueda and Dolors Márquez Cebrián’s *Prevenió de l’absentisme*

Olmos Rueda, Patricia, and Dolors Márquez Cebrián. 2026. *Prevenió de l’absentisme. Claus per “atreure” l’assistència a la classe universitària i millorar la participació activa*. Claus Docents. Institut de Ciències de l’Educació, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. 57 pp. ISBN 979-13-992149-5-6.

University teachers tend to notice absenteeism first as an empty seat. It is therefore tempting to frame the problem in similarly visible terms: students attend or they do not, and the institutional response consists in recording, encouraging or requiring attendance. Patricia Olmos Rueda and Dolors Márquez Cebrián’s *Prevenió de l’absentisme*, the first volume in the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona’s new *Claus Docents* series, begins from a more productive premise. Attendance is not simply something to be demanded from students but something teaching can make worthwhile. The authors distinguish occasional or structurally conditioned absence from habitual voluntary non-attendance and recognise that health, employment, family circumstances, transport and accessibility may lie beyond an individual lecturer’s control. They direct attention instead towards methodology, the organisation and communication of content, classroom dynamics, teaching materials, assessment and tutorial action. Their formulation is refreshingly clear: the objective is not to control attendance but to “attract” students towards the classroom by creating sessions in which they want to be present and participate actively (pp. 7–8). This changes the question from *How can we make students come?* to *What happens in our classes that makes being there educationally valuable?* It asks the teacher to examine the learning environment before converting absence into a moral diagnosis of the