

**Active Digital Citizenship as Seen by
Jordanian Middle & Secondary
School Students**

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Abstract

The intent of this study was to analyze the perceptions of ninth- and eleventh-grade students toward Active Digital Citizenship. Specifically, the study addresses: what students believe are the contributions of an active digital citizenship, what activities they participate in that are related to Active Digital Citizenship, and how students use technology to actively engage with society. The research used both a questionnaire and interviews to collect data from a stratified random sample of 525 students selected from three schools in northern Jordan provinces. The study findings reveal that students' views Active Digital Citizenship as entertainment/educational games rather than an engagement in a digital society. Additionally, the students do not have a clear picture of the definition of active digital citizens. The study concludes that the concept of Active Digital Citizenship is related to age appropriate.

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According to the Central Support Service for e Twinning (2016): The digital shift is transforming almost every aspect of our lives, with changes happening at a pace that is hard to keep up with. Everyone - workers, students, citizens – has to acquire the new skills and capabilities necessary to make full use of the possibilities and opportunities now open to us. Not only is there a need for digital skills for nearly all jobs. Everyone needs at least some basic digital skills in order to live, learn, communicate, and participate in society. (p. 1)

Beal, Bolick, and Martorella, (2008, p. 24) state that the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) defines an effective citizen as:

one who has the knowledge, skills, technology, and attitudes required to assume the office of citizen in our democratic republic to accomplished this goal, every student must participate in citizenship education activates each year. Throughout the curriculum and at every grade level, students should have opportunities to apply their civic knowledge, skills, and values as they work to solve real problems in their school, the community, national, and the world. These opportunities should part of a well-planned and organized citizenship education program. (Beal, Bolick,& Martorella,(2008, p. 24)

The aim of schooling around the globe is to teach students the knowledge, skills, and values needed to function as active citizens. In addition, schools translate these curricular objectives into knowledge of the community, nation, and world, and develop the skills and capabilities of students as Digital Citizens (Chiodo & Martin, 2005).

Active Digital Citizenship first and foremost refers to active citizens in society, but also to practices that make individuals competent members of a community. The global context of Active Digital Citizenship is changing as the nation-state is changing; therefore, the concept of Active Digital Citizenship has become the focus of both school and society (Chiodo & Martin, 2005). Consequently, digital citizens have been seen as users of technologies (recipients, consumers). Digital citizens can also become active participants. Their engagement does not only translate into the consumption of digital goods and content, but also is manifested in the creation of digital content, tools, apps, codes, and practices (Central Support Service for eTwinning, 2016).

This study explores how young students define Active Digital Citizenship and what important knowledge they need to be active citizens. Such information is necessary if educators are to fulfill their responsibilities to educate young students and to produce active citizens. It is significant to know how these students view Active Digital Citizenship if we are to move to a democratic society and develop instruction method to cultivate active citizenship curricula.

Viewing the Problem

Jordan's official position is to move rapidly into the digital society; consequently, Jordan's citizens will need to develop the knowledge and a skills base about digital technology. Citizenship education is a major subject of the school curricula because it explores skills and participation, It also provides students with the ability to understand the digital technology associated with being an active citizen. Developing Active Digital Citizenship is vital, therefore, to ensure that young Jordanians can

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participate in society online, using digital media to fulfill their civic duty, and take full advantage of the empowering potential of technology (Central Support Service for eTwinning,2016). It is also important to determine how Jordanian students view Digital Citizenship if the schools move to digital society.

Related Research

A review of the related studies reveals little research about active Digital Citizen and its curricula. Most studies focus on citizenship in general; none focus specifically on Active Digital Citizenship in middle and secondary school. According the Pew Research Center (2017):

Almost three-quarters of teens have or have access to a Smartphone and 30% have a basic phone, while just 12% of teens 13 to 17 say they have no cell phone of any type. By comparison, teens who don't access the internet via mobile devices tend to go online less frequently. Some 68% go online at least daily. Additionally, the majority of adults are getting their news from social media — and mostly from a single social media site.” (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 1)

Al-zahrani (2015) conducted a study about Digital Citizenship to examine graduate student's viewpoints the factors that influence the participation in an internet society.. The research reveals that the level of participation was acceptable. Dahshan (2016) investigated the concept of Digital Citizenship in the Arab world. The study findings show that the schools and parents have responsibilities to prepare student for the digital education and digital society. Smadi (2017) examined students' perceptions toward Digital

Citizenship. The research sample was 374 randomly chosen students. The study shows that the students' perceptions toward Digital Citizenship were modern. The researcher recommended more study should be conducted about Digital Citizenship.

Kubow and Kreishan (2014) conducted a study on hybrid citizenship in Jordan. The study purpose was to examine some challenges faced by the Jordanian government as it simultaneously navigates through liberalization and traditional markers of citizen identity. The study reveals that both tradition and modernity are promoted in hybridized school curricula in Jordan (p. 5). O'Brien and Smith (2011) surveyed 309 pre-service elementary teachers from nine different states. The survey asked participants, "What is a good citizen?" The two main criteria for good citizenship were: "helping others/community involvement" and "following laws." (Chiodo & Martin, 2005; Chiodo & Martin, 2007; Alazzi & Chiodo, 2008) conducted studies about good citizenship. Their researches reveal four categories that emerged from the student responses to their questionnaires. These categories were helping others, obeying rules and laws, patriotism–loyalty, and respect for others.

Yesilbursa (2015) surveyed pre-service social studies teachers' universities in Turkey regarding their perceptions of "good" citizenship. His research shows that the Turkish pre-service social studies teachers mostly perceive good citizens as people who are honest, decent, loyal to the government, and patriotic. Martin (2008) compared pre-service elementary teachers and pre-service secondary social studies teachers regarding their attitudes of citizenship. Research concludes that both elementary

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and high school pre-service teachers perceive good citizenship as assisting others.

Conover and Searing (2000) confirmed the students' ambiguous about active citizens in the future. Conover and Searing further contend that students will not be active citizen unless they do specific activities.

Flanagan (2003) also reports that all activities that include technology of young students are important to comprehend social and political values (such as identity, values, and social ties to others) (p. 257). Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1997) contend that the young people who participate in organizations create an "active citizen" and that these organizations "lead young to the basic roles required for political participation" (p. 624).

Engle and Ochoa (1998) argue that a good citizen is a person who is critical of the nation and who is willing to participate in its cultivation. The National Council for the Social Studies (1994) stated that "effective citizenship by individuals continues to require the same four essential elements as it did in the past; knowledge, thought, commitment, and actions" (p. 47).

Research Method:

This study was conducted at three large public schools in the northern portion of Jordan. A total of 525 students participated in this study. A stratified, random sample from all three school provinces was used to select participants. Students in province one consisted of 89 ninth-grade students and 95 eleventh-grade students. Students in province two consisted of 94 ninth-grade students and 92 eleventh-grade students. Province three had 80 ninth -grade student and 75 eleventh -grade students participate in the study..

Surveys were administered in students' classrooms and took approximately 20 minutes for the students to complete. The survey was written on a sheet paper, not according to likert scale. The survey was designed as a series of three open-ended questions as part of the qualitative studies, so more information, opinions, and feelings could be revealed (Chiodo & Martin, 2007). To gain a greater insight into the written comments made by the students, the researcher conducted interviews with a limited number of students. The researcher randomly selected 10 students from each of the 6 pools of students for a total of 60 participants.

The research used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data from students' responses to survey. For the qualitative data, the researcher used the phenomenological method to analyze students' interview responses. Notes described nonverbal cues and posture of each student. Each interview's text was then coded, and resulting themes were noted. Reinforcing themes were established within the bound system (ninth grade) through comparisons with field notes. The same procedure was completed for the second bound system (eleventh-grade).

Interviews were tape recorded to ensure accuracy and later were transcribed. Each transcript was verified by listening to the audiotape while reading the documentation (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2004, p. 6). The interviews were translated into English and analyzed qualitatively by the researcher. In addition, two trained researchers, who are proficient in both Arabic and English, were invited to review the translations by listening to the tapes and reading the written English text to eliminate translation errors or semantic

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misunderstanding. The use of predetermined questions and consistent procedures in coding supported the reliability of the findings. Data findings were given special attention to assess previous research. Each group was compared to the other, tracing the development of students' perceptions of digital citizenship through the reaction of the middle school and secondary school students (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2004).

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was submitted to three refereed social studies educational professors to evaluate, revise, and clarify the questionnaire. Based on their comments and recommendations, several modifications were made to make the instrument more accurate. In addition, to ensure reliability of interview, the data were reanalyzed by two social studies education professors. Their findings were compared to research findings, and each reached the same conclusion that no differences were evident among the findings.

Findings

Four categories emerged from the student responses on the questionnaires and interviews. The categories are (1) entertainment games; (2) educational games; (3) digital communication; and (4) social media. These appeared in relationship to all three questions that the students were asked.

Defining Active Digital Citizenship

The first survey question asked students was what it means to be active digital citizen. Social Media had the largest number of responses to this question. The responses range from 49% of the ninth-grade students and 62% of the eleventh-grade students in province one;

province two and three responded that using social media of communication is an important aspect of being a active Digital Citizen. Province two ninth-grade students had the highest response rate with 71% indicated using social media for communication, especially for homework and between peers. Students mentioned that they acted as active Digital Citizens by participating in activities, such as sending email to the school; helping low skills students, who have difficulty using technology; volunteering to design national ceremonies activities; and engaging in community technology activities. Usually, student responses about digital technology included comments like: “doing school project through technology” or “helping others who need assistant in technology.” Table 1 shows the breakdown of responses by students to Question 1: What is your definition of an active Digital Citizen?

Table 1. Definition of Active Digital Citizen

Response category: Social Media/ digital communication						
Grade Level	Ninth Grade			Eleventh Grade		
	n	R	%	n	r	%
Geographic Area						
Province #1	89	55	49	95	50	53
Province #2	94	75	71	92	48	62
Province #3	80	50	63	75	45	60

Note. n = total number of students in the group; r = total number of responses by students

in the group; % = percentage of responses of the total group.

Generally, the responses fell into the categories of using social media/communication with others through social media as the definition of a Digital Citizen. When asked about the qualities of a Digital Citizen, many

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students responded with good characteristics, such as: “do not bother others through social media,” “good-character of using technology,” “defining country through social media,” “speaking courteous,” “integrity when using social media,” “don’t use technology to harm others,” “be consciousness when using technology,” “be transparency with others,” “be responsible when use technology,” “warn other people when they doing wrong,” and “supervise young brother and sister when they use technology.”

Responses seem to not understanding what Digital Citizen means and look as it is a new concept or theme. Furthermore, some responses showed surprise when we mention Digital Citizenship. **Demonstrating Active Digital Citizenship**

The second survey question asked students what activities they participate in that are related to Active Digital Citizenship. Again, the students overwhelmingly mentioned using social media as the main way to demonstrate Active Digital Citizenship. The percent of responses ranged from 39% for province one ninth graders to 56% for province three eleventh graders. Many responses mention using a mobile device for educational purposes (cell phones, iPads, Tab-lets). Several students said they do service activities as part of the school program; an example of such was communication tools: Skype, Google hangouts, social media. An interesting comment, mentioned several times was categorized under social media and communication: “doing entertainment games,” Mine Craft,” “Warcraft”, “video game systems,” and “online games.” Several students mention educational games as a way of acting as an active Digital

Citizen; these games include games, such as “Mine Craft Edu,” “Gamester Mechanics,” “Tynker,” and “Quest Atlantis.” Students viewed activities, such as entertainment games and educational games, all of which are often part of entertainment games and educational games as compatible with being “Active Digital Citizen.” Generally speaking, responses did not distinguish between activities related to Active Digital Citizenship and entertainment activities. It seems that the students are not involved in the community or organization activities to recognize the role of Active Digital Citizenship.

Table 2 provides detail of the responses to Question 2: what activities they participate in that are related to Active Digital Citizenship?

Table 2. Activities That Demonstrate Active Digital Citizenship

Response Category: Entertainment Games/and Educational Games						
Grade Level	Ninth Grade			Eleventh Grade		
	n	r	%	n	r	%
Geographic Area						
Province #1	89	35	39	95	45	47
Province #2	94	45	49	92	42	46
Province #3	80	38	48	75	42	56

Note. n = total number of students in the group; r = total number of responses by students

in the group; % = percentage of responses of the total group.

Digital Citizenship Engagements

The third question asked students how students support using technology to actively the hardest question for students to answer. With regards to this question, ninth graders were more uncertain how they will be using

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technology to involve in community than eleventh graders. Many students believe that having Active Digital Citizenship means using technology in all aspects of life. Some comments the students made were: “following my school’s regulation through the school web and I watch news through my devices,” “I look for any activities ‘through the digital access in my community,” “I will be work in the community through digital access,” and, in the future, I will communicate with my community through all devices,” “Digital Access to all participation in society.”

Of the three categories developed from the student responses, digital communication is the most commonly mentioned activity that students will engage to support the digital community or society in the future. Electronic devices for buying and selling of goods are another element of Active Digital Citizenship was mentioned by all groups, except ninth grade province students. Several students used the phrase, “I will be use devices to purchase and sell through internet” as an Active Digital Citizenship. Still others made statements such as: “I will obey the laws,” “try to be involved,” and “I will vote through technology in the future.” During follow-up interviews, the students were asked they are aware of the ninth element of digital citizenship, such as digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, and digital health and wellness. Other than digital communication, their comments did not demonstrate much depth. Students seemed to have a hard time relating to the ninth element of Digital Citizenship to the active digital aspects of citizenship. Table 3 provides

details of the responses by the students for Question 3: how a student supports using technology to actively engage with society.

Table 3. How a Student Supports Using Technology to Actively Engage With Society.

Response category: Digital communication /access devices?						
Grade Level	Ninth Grade			Eleventh Grade		
	n	r	%	n	r	%
Geographic Area						
Rural	89	46	52	95	40	42
Suburban	94	52	55	92	50	54
Urban	80	38	48	75	39	52

Note. n = total number of students in the group; r = total number of responses by students

in the group; % = percentage of responses of the total group.

The ninth element of Digital Citizenship, such as digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness and digital security seems to be separate or distant from the students' minds. Very few times did the terms digital communication appear in the students' comments. Yet, the term digital communication was evident in the large majority of the responses to all three questions.

Discussion

The most important finding in this study is what was not mentioned. Most ninth- and eleventh-grade students did not respond to the ninth element of Digital Citizenship. Rather, they responded that entertainment games/and educational games are compatible with being "Active Digital Citizens. Eleventh graders were more focused on the digital communication. Students had a

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difficult time visualizing themselves as Active Digital Citizens. These findings support Conover and Searing's (2000) idea that students are ambiguous about active citizens in the future. Conover and Searing contended that students will not be active unless they can do specific activities related to their society.

Students strongly expressed activity about the entertainment games/and educational games. Both grades expressed participation in the Active Digital Citizenship in a variety of ways. Students explained how they take an active part in their school and community. They take an active part in their schools through playing entertainment games, such as "Mine Craft," "Warcraft," "video game systems," "online games," "Mine Craft edu," "Gamester Mechanics," "Tynker," and "Quest Atlantis as having Digital Citizenship. The comments by the students seem to agree with Dahshan (2016) and Smadi (2017). Their findings were that schools and parents have responsibilities to prepare student to digital education and digital society. It also seems that the students are not involved in the community or organization activities related to Digital Citizenship, which is consistent with Youniss, McLellan, and Yates's (1997) finding that the young people who participate in organization create an "active citizen" and that these organizations "lead young to the basic roles required for political participation" (p. 624). All ideas central to our vision of Active Digital Citizenship were virtually non-existent in the participants' responses in their survey or in their interview.

As teacher educators, we also should be aware that middle and high school students are limited when it

comes to the digital side of citizenship. The reality is that they cannot practice digital citizen unless they have support from their parents, schools, community, and Ministry of Education. Thus, we suggest that Active Digital Citizenship should reflect mental maturity. Students may be developing a solid foundation regarding Digital Citizenship through the development of the aspects of citizenship (Chiodo & Martin, 2007).

No major differences were found in the responses between the ninth- and eleventh- grade students in all three geographic areas. Ninth-grade students tended to respond in more detail in writing their answers on the questionnaire, as well as when responding to the interviews.

Additional research is needed to add or refute the conclusion of this study. This study was conducted in three schools in the same school region, and this could be a potential deficiency. Further studies are needed from different provinces to analyze a broad base of students. Although the researchers are satisfied with the facts and findings, the limitations of mixed methods studies are recognized. A broad quantitative survey may further assist the understanding of student's perception toward Active Digital Citizenship.

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