

A continuous challenge

Exploratory research on digital
vulnerability in Groningen

Dr.s Arnout Ponsioen



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Content

1. Context of the study
2. Aim of the study
3. Main research questions
4. Approach
5. Results
6. Advice



1. Context of the research



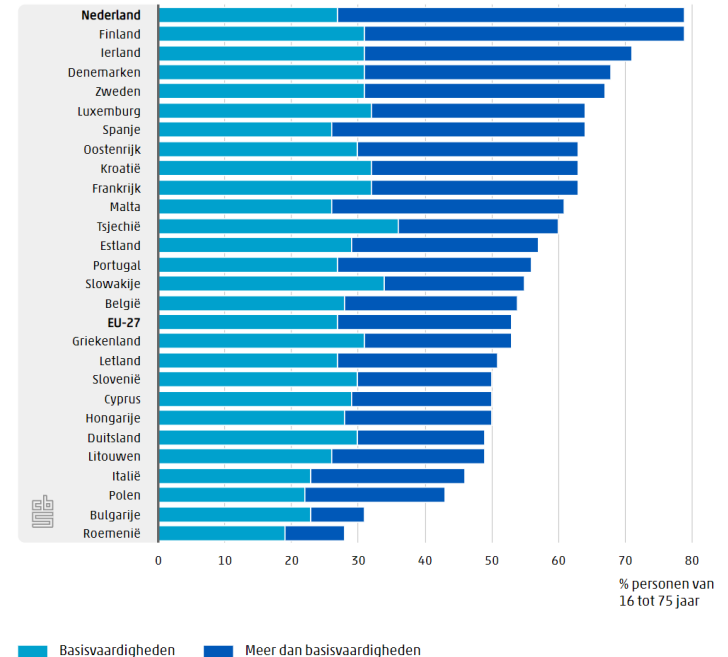
1. Context of the study

About **80%** of the Dutch have basic or higher levels of digital skills

But this still means that **20%** has lower than 'basic levels' of digital skills!

Digital skills are **unevenly spread**: people who are older, less educated, have migrant background tend to have lower levels of digital skills.

Digitale vaardigheden EU-27, 2021



Bron: CBS, Eurostat



1. Context of the study

15% - 30% or **2.5 – 5 million** of Dutch citizens have problems using digital devices... to find jobs, buy products, organize finance, fulfill its administrative duties, use health care systems, find and select valuable information and news, maintain social networks, etc. (BZK, 2022; CBS, 2022; Algemene Rekenkamer, 2016; VNG, 2020)))

Inhabitants in the North: **1.741.000** (CBS, 2022)

Inhabitants in the North with basic digital skills: **261.000-522.000** (or 207.000-414.000 adults)



1. Context of the study

Akkoord van Groningen:

'[...] to become the most digitally skilled region of the Netherlands by 2025.'





1. Context of the study

Digital Literacy Coalition (DLC):

In 2018 about 20 influential regional organisations started the 'Digital Literacy Coalition'

To realize this ambition with e.g. interventions in living labs + research on its effects.





1. Context of the study

Digitale Academie Noord-Nederland (DANN)

In 2020 four members of the DLC initiated in 2020 the Digitale Academie Noord-Nederland

- Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen
- University of Groningen
- Noorderpoort College (secondary vocational education)
- Biblionet Groningen (library organisation)



Main ambition: to help **all citizens** in developing their digital skills **'one level up'**



1. Context of the study

Digitale Academie Noord-Nederland



- **Searchable overview** of all options to learn digital skills in the North (higher/lower levels, incidental meetings and courses, informal/formal, offline/online, paid/free).
- **A platform with assesment tools** to identify what their digital skills levels are and what they want to learn, and matching their 'needs' with available options to learn.
- **An awareness campaign** '*Groningen shifts its focus on digital*' aimed at organisations and individuals with access to digital vulnerable groups.



2. Aim of the study



2. Aim of the study

Problem

- Data about digital skills in Groningen are lacking
- Mainly national statistics available + some qualitative studies
- Not easily translatable to regional levels, let alone local / individual levels.

Solution

- Digital Academy North Netherlands (DANN) funded an **exploratory** qualitative research



2. Aim of the study

Three aims of the research:

1. To get a deeper understanding of the **diversity** of knowledge, skills, usage and perceptions of digital technology in everyday life of Northern citizens, and their wish and possibilities to learn digital skills.
2. To **discuss the importance** of developing digital skills and the role the DANN can play in this in the North
3. To start **building a network** of professional and voluntary organisations and individuals with access to digitally vulnerable citizens in the North.



3. Research questions



3. Main research questions

1. Access and usage	To what extent have digital vulnerabel citizens access to digital divices (or not), and in what role does it play in everyday life?
2. Skills and barriers	To what extent do digital vulnerabel citizens have (which kinds of) digital skills, what are the reasons for low levels of digital skills, and how does it have impact on their everyday lives?
3. Learning and developing	How do digital vulnerable citizens learn new digital skills, what digital skills do they want te learn, and how do they search for and select options to learn these digital skills?
4. DANN	To what extent do digital vulnerable citizens know about the goal and services of the DANN, and when does it generate relevance for them?



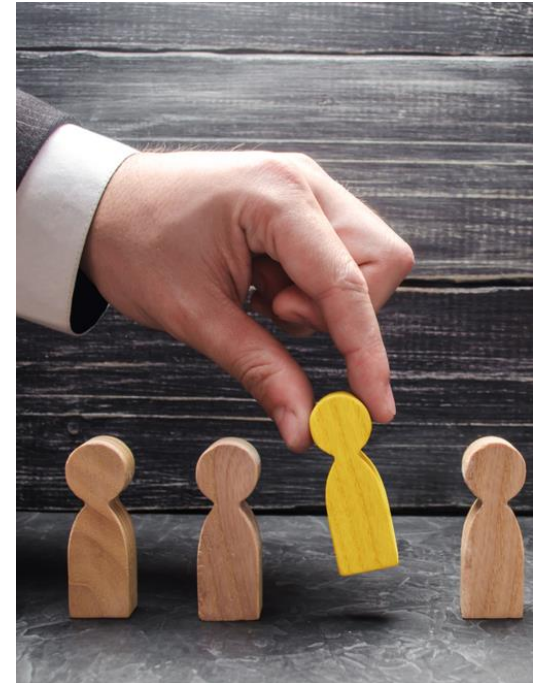
4. Approach



4. Approach

Target groups

Primary group	Secondary group
Professional and voluntary organisations <i>with access to vulnerable groups</i> ('toeleiders')	digital vulnerabel citizens

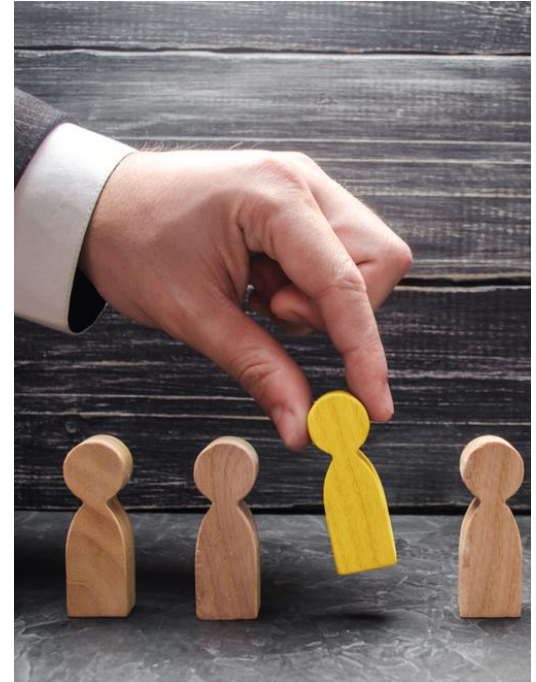




4. Approach

‘Organic’ recruiting of respondents

- **Broad approach:** contacting regional/local municipalities, welfare organisations, housing associations, tenant organisations, migrant/refugee organisations, elderly organisations, healthcare organisations, citizens organisations (villages)
- **Focused approach:** using direct contacts of steering group members of the DANN, relevant contacts within DLC, and network of lectorate Digital Transformation of Hanze.
- **Snowball methodology:** asking each of respondents to suggest and/or introduce to other relevant organisations/individuals





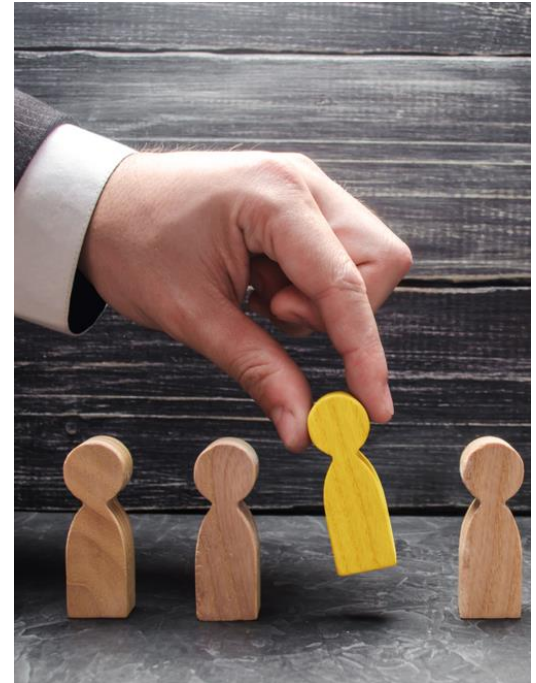
4. Approach

Respons

- Individual/duo interviews: 53 (+16 done by RUG students)
- Group interviews/observations: 10

Interviews/observations

- Qualitative interviews/observations (individual and groups)
- On location of respondent or online via MS Teams
- (Mostly) recorded and transcribed
- Coded and analysed in Atlas.ti





4. Approach

Topics

Block 1: everyday life	Block 2: digital technology	Block 3: learning / developing	Block 4: DANN
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• life history• main activities• social network• worries/problems	<p>[RQ 1+2]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• access to / possession of digital devices• Its usages• availability of digital skills• available auxiliary structures• dissatisfaction about digitalisation• digital resilience/safety/problem solving• expectations towards future of digitalisation	<p>[RQ 3]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• preferred/current learning practices• trusted providers of learning• search practices• incentives to learn• knowledge of options to learn digital skills• reasons for not using options to learn digital skills	<p>[RQ 4]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• knowledge of existence of DANN• perceived added value of DANN



5. Results



5. Results

Who are digital vulnerable?

- **Very diverse group:** older, low literacy, migrant background, physically/mentally disabled (but... not 'all older', 'all low literacy', etc.)
- **Additionally mentioned:**
 - younger people ('digital illiterates of the future')
 - my colleagues, etc.
 - Minimalists / standing aside

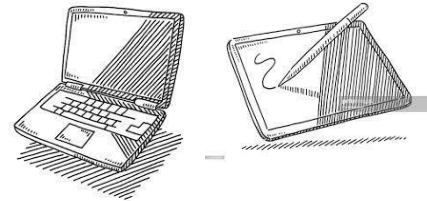
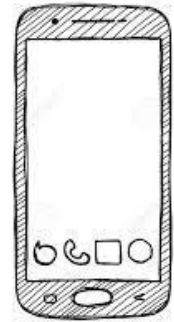


5. Results



Access to internet and digital devices

- Internet access mainly **at home**
- **Mobile device** (almost all possess one)
- Mobile device used for **divers digital tasks**: social network, entertainment, payments, searching information, formal administration (mobile device restricts!)
- Less possessed/used: **tablet** (entertainment), **laptop** (administration)
- Almost not possessed/used: **PC** ('orphanised existence'), **smart digital devices** (only when intrinsically interested in digital technology)





5. Results

What digital skills are (not) available?

- **Understanding hardware/software;** in general low levels; problems with configuration of new device, username/password, two-factor authentication, notifications, pop-ups, working in the cloud, connecting with other devices
- **Searching/managing information:** 'critically' searching and getting overview is difficult, leading to vulnerability for external influences and underutilization of subsidies





5. Results

What digital skills are (not) available?

- **Communication/interaction:** Social networking and buying/selling products are doable, but digital administration is problematic (need external help)
- **Content:** users, not producers of content; mainly working with photos





5. Results

Resilience to digital threats

- Strong **awareness** of digital threats
- **What do they fear:** phishing/hacking, breaking the digital device, providing wrong information, losing privacy





5. Results

Resilience to digital threats

- **Factors that stimulate their fears**
 - suspicious mindset, influence of 'stories', warnings by big organisations
 - low quality devices, not using anti-virus, weak username/password, expectation that producers must/will deliver safety, unrealistic expectations of their own alertness and ability to act





5. Results

Resilience to digital threats

- **Limited 'repertoire' to decrease digital threats:**
 - look critically at sender, being less digital active, using less apps, keep a list, using help by others





5. Results

Resilience to digital threats

- **Situations when feelings of digital threats increase:** digital skilled partner falls away, software updates, unable to log in, unclear messages, their own actions to solve a digital problem do not work, seeing personalised content (privacy)
- **Potential indirect negative effects of digital threats:** increasing depts, negativity spiral, social isolation





5. Results

Help structures

- Digital informal care (family, friends, neighbours)
- Libraries
- Welfare organisations
- Commercial organisations
- Housing associations
- Tenant associations
- Target group organisations
- Local role models





5. Results

Reasons for not using help structures

- Shame (for their own lack of knowledge)
- Being a burden to others
- Privacy loss
- Not having a social network
- Not having overview





5. Results

Motivations and conditions to start learning digital skills

- To be able to solve an **acute short term problem**
- To get specific important **benefits** (financial, goods, etc.) -> instrumental
- Some(!) **coercion** by other organisations
- Stimulating trusted **others** (familiar faces)
- **Access** to digital devices
- Enough **'rest'** in life/head





5. Results

How to reach and stimulate them to learn?

- **Pro-active** approach (be where they are)
- **Traditional media** (local newspaper, radio, etc.)
- Using existing social local **networks**
- Make use of **game and reward**
- Having **one collective story**/approach locally





5. Results

What do they want to learn?

- How digital devices work
- Using office software (basics)
- Working with photo's (archiving, processing, sharing)
- Searching on internet (advanced)
- Increasing online safety
- Increasing social network
- Digital administration





5. Results

What are ideal 'forms' to learn

- Fysical!
- Humor, inspiration, meeting others
- Problem solving
- Short term oriented
- Nearby
- Small bits/pieces, one question, own tempo and language
- Individual or small groups
- Familiar faces!





6. Advice



6. Advice

1. **Connect** - build a stronger regional community of professionals and voluntary organisations and individuals with access to digital voluntary citizens (DANN + organisations)
2. **Facilitate**: Help community members and their employees to raise awareness and become more digitally skilled (DANN + Hanze)
3. **Converse**: Stimulate broader and stronger societal conversation about the importance of digital skills and digitalisation (governments + media).
4. **Include**: invest in making options to learn/develop digital skills more inclusive (DANN)



6. Advice

5. Experiment: Start new living labs (DLC)

- Bringing options to learn/develop digital skills to 'village halls'
- Using 'locally familiar faces'
- Giving access to digital devices
- Matchmaking within peer groups
- Promoting villages as 'Digital Villages'
- Digital skills in 'voorzieningswijzer' (poverty policy instrument)



6. Advice

6. Research: collect new knowledge (Hanze + RUG)

- Build a 'risk map' about digital skills (based on open data)
- Make a network analysis of regional/local organisations/individuals
- Do comparable 'village ethnographies' about local learning dynamics
- Do qualitative studies about specific digital vulnerable groups
- Ethical boundaries of digitalisation and potential for learning
- Facts versus sentiment about 'online safety'
- Preventing undesirable 'digital dependencies' of partners within families
- Indirect negative effects of digitalisation (e.g. depts, negativity/distrust, social isolation)



6. Advice

7. Educate

- Generate more awareness and understanding of the impact of digitalisation, the complex challenge to learn digital skills and be inclusive, in all professional educational systems.

Arnout Ponsioen

Researcher at Lectorate Digital Transformation

Lecturer at Communication / International Communication

Institute Communication, Media and IT (SCMI)

a.ponsioen@pl.hanze.nl

