

Making Teaching Compatible with the Digital Natives: A Survey

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Abstract— The century in which we, the teachers being the digital immigrants, were all born and the one in which we are at present are different. The line of differentiation between the former and the latter is the word 'digital' which stands as a synonym for this 21st century, being the age of Information. Globalisation has seen the proliferated use of the digital interface in this age and has brought into the field two vast by-products of technology: e-commerce and e-learning. Teaching is no exception in the digital context. As a result, this paper keys the significance of the new technology and the methods of digital teaching and learning of English language from various sources and experiences of the teaching community. The findings are based on the data collected from the questionnaire through random sampling method among the English language teachers in select colleges in Chennai.

Keywords: Digitalization, Technology, e-learning, digital teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology has made learning at the fingertips of the learners, thereby making them tech savvies. It is useful as a knowledge search engine and goes beyond as a constructive tool for self-exploration. However, it is the teachers' morale to make things productive for the young learners who are addictive in nature to the diversions created by the same technology. Amidst the ample use of social networks like Google plus, Facebook, Twitter, Linked in, Instagram and Whatsapp, not all the students know about the web tools that are really helpful to create their own lessons, collect materials, share notes and monitor their progress step by step. It is here where the teachers can support as a facilitator who can moderate the session and make it lively.

Today, technology has manifested itself in the form of smart phone devices in the hands of students. They spend much time on their mobile devices for playing online games, surfing YouTube videos and being active in Social Media. Anything when exceeds its usage becomes destructive for the user. Therefore, the user needs to be cautious enough in using mobile applications that can largely affect their academics. The teachers play a vital role as to how they can incorporate technology into their existing teaching methodology and introduce various web tools for the development of the present generation learners.

Setting the Context

We are living in the age of customization, where 'one size fits all' can no longer survive in the educational field. Conventional classrooms go by the lecture method and a prescribed pre-designed syllabus based on which the entire

process of learning happens. Today, with the addition of technology, Black boards are replaced with smart boards or otherwise known as Interactive Electronic Whiteboards and the chalk piece being replaced by the Whiteboard markers. Integrating technology into the present-day classroom does not end with the replacement of the traditional blackboard and chalk piece. Instead, it means integrating technology into the art of teaching where teachers and their teaching methodologies give life to these technological tools.

The changeover can be felt only if the conventional classroom methodology of addressing a heterogeneous group of students is transferred into a much adaptive, personalised education. Customization can meet the requirements of the students and can bring into focus 'what a student really needs to learn.' Technology helps teachers to customize the 'learning part' based on an individual's need and further provides a personalised education for the students.

Teachers, today, are teaching the heterogeneous group of students who are not anymore as same as the group that teachers taught a decade ago. With the advent of technology, students, being the digital natives, either are distracted and so diverted from their academics or knowing more than what their syllabus asks them to know. Therefore, the scenario present before the teachers is at two different extremes. To cope with the Digital Natives, there arises a need for the teachers to be updated not only in terms of the concerned syllabus but also the teaching methodologies that are gradually becoming tech-oriented because of the rapid growth of digitalization. It is here where the need for making teaching compatible with the students becomes important. By Compatible, teachers go along with the pace by learning to use technology for pedagogic purposes and experiment the same.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this digital era, students spend most of the time with their smart phones for browsing and playing games. Researchers have proved that usage of mobile phones has been increasing every year. Kyle Williamscholz (2015) has suggested that online game based language learning environment gives opportunity for the second language learners. His study has focused on the role playing game World of War craft (WoW), where students can interact with their peers about the game and transfer the linguistic constructions successfully. Ruxana Hossain Parvin et.al (2015) in their project work among the teachers in Bangladesh found that the primary school teachers of Bangladesh need audio-visual classroom materials for their effective classroom teaching.

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The result of this study also projected that using audio-visual aids in classroom makes students attentive.

Nik Peachey (2014) has exposed that there is a need for teachers to use digital tools to make teaching and learning more effective. It also contained 70 tools and resources which is possible to adopt at present. These digital tools play an important role in enhancing the students' collaborative digital study and research skills.

Willam Charpentier Jimenez (2014) has conducted an electronic survey among fifty students of B.A in order to find out the effectiveness of using ICT (Information and communication technology). The study has resulted that ICT is an effective method to improve students' macro linguistic skills. The survey also revealed that the use of technology in their grammar and oral courses was very low. The study exposed that ICTs are not given much importance in their major subjects.

Eric Brown (2014) has investigated the impact of New Media in English for the second language learners of Sweden to provide the practical alternatives to equip the entire field of language education into digital age.

Linda Bradley (2013) has focused on students' activity through web-based environment. This study has revealed that web-based environment is giving space for the students to do interaction such as responding, collaborating and discussing. It also emphasized those web-based writing technologies providing the opportunities to equip linguistic, discursive and cultural competences.

Panagiotis (2012) has reported in his study that creating personal learning environment develops the language proficiency of learners. This study focused on the Personal Learning Environment (PLE), which helps learner to get both formal and informal education practices.

Roman Cancinov (2010) has focused on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The study recommends that teachers should be aware of using technologies both inside and outside the school. He has concluded that modern devices motivate students to learn the language in different dimensions.

3. OBJECTIVE

Understanding the necessity for being compatible, this research paper aims at the significance of the gradually increasing need to use technology for teaching English and the awareness of the teaching community on integrating digital medium into language teaching.

4. METHODOLOGY

In order to substantiate the level of compatibility with respect to the usage of technology in the teaching of language, a questionnaire survey was conducted among the English language teachers from different colleges of Chennai. The objective of the questionnaire was to collect data on the use of technological learning aids for teaching and learning of English from the perspective of the teaching community. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions out of which 7 were designed to be close-ended dichotomous questions, 1 was a multiple response question and the rest 2 were open-ended questions. 'Google Forms' was used as a tool to design the questionnaire and collect responses from

the sample. To collect data, the link of the questionnaire was sent to the teaching population and the responses were accepted until the response count reached 31, determining to be the random sample for this study.

5. RESULTS & INTERPRETATION

In order to understand the quantitative data summarized by the responses collected through Google Forms, the questions in the questionnaire were segmented into four groups. First, questions 1 to 5 were designed to gather information on how far the language teacher is aware of using technology as well as to know how much they integrate technology in their teaching methodology. Second, questions 6, 7 and 9 were grouped together to identify the thoughts of the teaching community as to how far technology acts as a solution for problems faced by the digital natives like attention retaining, individual attention and customized learning. Third, Question 8, being an open-ended question, addressed the language teachers' opinion on using Social media as a language learning medium. Question 10, being the last and an open-ended question, recorded the teaching community's understanding of digital teaching of English as well as their suggestions on how technology is compatible enough for the digital natives.

1. Teacher Awareness & Technology

Today, the use of technology has become indispensable in all the streams of life to the extreme that it is inseparable from the day-to-day modern life. In the field of education, it is the teacher who gives life to these lifeless technological devices through their teaching methodology. As teachers, we should be aware of the nuances of technology and should use it for a creative process of knowledge dissemination. The teachers of this era are updated and have an eclectic approach towards using technology. In order to strengthen their pedagogic skills, all the language teachers from the random sample (N=31) use mobile applications, participate in online forums and try to use various other web tools for pedagogic purposes. The survey, further, acknowledges that the majority of the language teachers resulting in 83.9% of the random sample are aware of Online Courses / Webinars and attend the same for their continuous professional development.

Besides using technology for their career development, teachers are ready to encourage their students to use mobile applications and other sources of internet as a learning resource material. Though certain institutions do not allow students to use mobile phones inside the campus or during the class hours, there are teachers who sometimes take risk in allowing the students to use their devices for reference. This is evident through the response recorded in the questionnaire where 96.8% of teachers encourage their students to use technology for learning. In addition, majority of the English teachers resulting in 87.1% have tried using various mobile applications and other digital medium for the benefit of students. Some of the mobile applications and digital sources suggested by the language teachers are Blogger, Word Press, Google Images, YouTube, Google Classroom, Google Forms, Slideshare, Mepro, Moodle, Edmodo, Pinterest, and Google Drive.

With regards to English language teaching, Blinkist app for reading, Magoosh app for GRE preparation, Fluent U for language learning through real-world videos, Mobile dictionaries with audio input, Keepvid to download videos, Kahoot for conducting quizzes, Orai for speaking skills that focuses on instant feedback are some of the specific mobile applications suggested by the sample of this study. Today, the language teachers watch Ted Talks, listen to audio books, recorded lectures and Podcasts, read blogs, e-books and e-journals, communicate through e-mail and Facebook. Further, the age in which they teach makes them to use WhatsApp to communicate and share notes with the students. This asserts the fact that the language teachers are updating themselves to use technological aids into their teaching methodology and are using the digital platform to make learning impressive to the digital natives.

2. Technology as A Solution

Apart from integrating technology into teaching methodology, it can also be seen as a powerful communicating channel that connects students with the teachers round the clock. This makes learning possible even outside the classroom. 87.1% of the sample think that technology definitely helps them to connect with students after the class hours while the remaining 12.9% feel that technology may be helpful in this case. Besides knowing that many teachers use WhatsApp as a tool for connecting with the students, survey has also recorded that Social media such as Twitter, Skype, Messenger, Facebook, Blogs, E-mail, Video Conferencing and other web tools such as TESOL Forum, Ning.com, Google classroom are some of the other communicating medium that teachers often use to connect with students outside the classroom.

With the innovations led by e-learning platforms such as Khan Academy, Byju's Learning App, Course.org, and other Learner Management Systems (LMS) such as Moodle, Open edX, iSpring Learn and Skolera, there develops an exigent demand for personalized learning among the learners of the present generation. Since they are tech-savvies, it is easy for them to access various courses and its components as per their requirement for their academic as well as career growth. No doubt, teaching heterogeneous group of students becomes easier with technology. 80.6% of the language teachers do think that technology provides space for personalized learning to cater to the diverse needs of the students in a classroom while 16.1% think that technology may provide space for customization in learning. When it comes to language teaching, focusing on the specific needs such as vocabulary building, enhancing public speaking skill, constructing proper paragraphs, writing essays and the like can be achieved through personalized learning as each learner has their own specific area to be developed.

Retaining the attention span of the digital natives becomes challenging as they are already diverted by many continuous web series providers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime video and other such streaming media. On the contrary, 90.3% of language teachers strongly feel that using technology for language learning could grab the attention of the students and increase their classroom participation while the remaining 9.7% of them agree to the partial opinion that using technology may retain the students' attention.

3. Social Media as Language Learning Medium

Social Media is certainly one of the hallmarks of the internet age. It has a varied usage among the digital natives beyond the communication point of view and functions as a storehouse of information that is used as knowledge cum contact gathering resource. This survey helps in identifying the diverse opinions of the teaching community on using Social media as a language learning medium through the open-ended question asked in the survey. Teachers feel that social media removes inhibitions of the students towards communication where they enjoy their experience of learning through such media. Further, it helps teachers to give immediate and personalised feedback to students which increases their participation and creates space for wholesome learning.

When one of the teachers in the random sample thinks that social media is prerogative when channelized properly, the other feels that it enhances digital literacy among both the students and the teachers. Apart from learning to use technology, students also learn new vocabulary pertaining to internet such as subscribe, poke, nudge and newsfeed. These words are identified as Net-lingo and function as a linguistic part of digital literacy which increases their strength of vocabulary. When it comes to accessibility, one of the teachers in the survey said, "Technology is easily available for the learner and moreover they know how to use it. Learning happens even beyond the classroom through social media." Though there are a few teachers who wish not to recommend Social Media as a tool to teach due to distractions caused by it, there are other responses where the teachers feel that it has become necessary for today's learners that gives them a lot of exposure and makes learning an effective one.

4. Digital teaching of English & its Compatibility:

Digital teaching, to the sample of this study, is a supplement to our traditional ways of teaching. Teachers, being the makers of the future generation, should teach how to use technology effectively to the present generation of learners. The digital natives get sufficient data through social media but it takes time for them to learn the reliability and authenticity of the resources. Therefore, they are in the need of the teachers' guidance which would facilitate them to use it in a better way.

One of the teachers has strongly felt the need for digital teaching and thereby has responded so: "Digital teaching is the future for sure. Even if it is not on a full-fledged scale, at least technology will have to be used on a partial scale as students are born with technology in this era. When they are well ahead in the technology use, we cannot stop them and make them unlearn technology. Especially for the teachers of English language, there are plenty of resources available in the digital platform to make the students learn the language easily and quickly. It is because the students of this generation are comfortable with technology rather than the conservative chalk and board method, are they called digital natives. Hence, it is our duty to be compatible with the needs and comforts of the students." This proves that the language teachers are really trying to understand the connectivity between technology and digital natives, and hence recommends it to make teaching compatible.

When it comes to language teaching, technology can be used to a great extent that students can listen and learn to pronounce new words through audio enabled mobile dictionaries and through certain specific videos. Teaching English using audio books, video transcripts, making students attend the quizzes online, evaluating and providing individual feedback are some of the notable features of using digital methods in a classroom. Students find it interesting to involve themselves in various activities posted on digital platforms.

6. CONCLUSION

The significance of digital teaching of English for today's generation becomes the need of the hour and it is evident through the response made by one of the teachers: "If the teachers fail to update themselves with regards to digital teaching, there arises disconnect between the teacher and the learner." Students become more receptive when technology is used as a medium for learning as it is visually appealing to the eyes of the learners. In addition, the survey has resulted in the fact that digital teaching of English is a student-friendly method which encourages learner motivation, increases their active participation and facilitates progressive learning. To sum up, digital teaching and learning can extend the student-teacher interaction outside the classroom, retain the attention span and provide a customized education to the learners of present generation.

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