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TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO DIGITAL GENERATION

НАВЧАННЯ ЦИФРОВОГО ПОКОЛІННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ

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The last decades of the 20th century in the life of humanity are sometimes called as going through a point of “singularity” – fundamental changes without going backwards. The digital era led to radical changes in a human’s life. As a result, there emerged a new generation of young people, who, being surrounded by cellphones, internet, video cams, video players, grew up with a new technology. New scenery of the 21st century classroom poses the question of keeping up with technological advances, adequacy of teaching style for today’s students at various educational institutions, in particular, at universities. The aim of the paper is to research types of digital users, define their characteristics, learning styles, find out some peculiarities of teaching them foreign languages, in general, and English for specific purposes, in particular.

The term “digital natives”, introduced by Mark Prensky [1], refers to people born in the digital era. According to the theory of generations, each of them has its own characteristics distinguishing one from another and encounters for 4 groups:

1) Baby boomers generation (1945–1964) – the name arises from the fact that after the World War II many soldiers came home after war and started families; 2) Generation X (1965–1980) – hard working, independent, skeptical; 3) Generation Y (1981–1999) – confident, technologically advanced; 4) Generation Z (2000–present) [2, p. 2].

There are some other names for Generation Z: N (net) generation, D (digital) generation, V (viral) generation – if we think about common denominator-information and communication technologies. Due to technological addiction, Generation Z is referred to as iGeneration, Online Generation, Facebook generation, Switchers, Gen Tech. [3]

So, a Digital Native is a person confident in using digital technologies – Internet, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, smartphones, Ipad. They think social media, Google, YouTube as main resources for searching information.

What are their learning characteristics? Firstly, they are tech savvy, able to master technological advances faster than other generations. Secondly, they are observers and, before they put into practice gained knowledge, they observe others performing a task and enjoy activities that will help them in real-life situations. Thirdly, they are social, taking little care for privacy, share their life experience, what makes them collaborative and creative, that, in its turn, will help them to change workplace according to new conditions easily. Next, this is a generation of multitaskers – they can talk, watch, read, text messages in parallel. By a click, they can easily find any information, any answer, getting fast access to Internet. But on the other hand, dividing attention for each task, are incapable of focusing and analyzing more complex information-what is called in medicine as “acquired attention deficit disorder”. After that, this generation is speedy as the information is to be received very fast and they look forward to constant enjoyment, lacking patience unlike older generations.

And the last, but the most distinctive, feature of the Gen Z is the fact that due to the immerse in the digital environment, the way of thinking and processing information of today’s students differs greatly from their forerunners. It is thought that a Digital Native’s brain possesses such quality as a neuroplasticity – a capability of a brain to reorganize itself – and a phenomenon of malleability – when new thinking patterns help a brain to adapt to a new environment.

So, what is a learning style of a Generation Z students?

1. They learn from experimentation. They prefer learning by doing rather than to be told what to do or reading static books
2. They prefer visual learning. Living in multimedia environment, feel comfortable in it.
3. They like to work in groups. Teamwork is great because fast learners can help slow learners, sharing knowledge with each other and gaining support.

4. They have short attention spans and multi-task well, like doing a few things at the same time, moving attention from one task to another.

5. Edutainment (combination of words education and entertainment) – content of a program allows a learner use entertaining for learning. Gen Z considers the process of learning to be interactive with funny activities [2, p. 4, 5].

Unlike Digital Natives, “Digital Immigrants” are people, mostly teachers and parents, who, though adopted new technologies, nevertheless, are less competent in using them.

Digital Immigrants are classified into 3 types (evaders, the hesitant users and the keen users) depending on their attitude towards digital technologies and the way they incorporate them in everyday life and jobs [4; p. 2, 3].

According to Prensky, the single biggest problem facing education today is that “digital immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language” [1, p. 2]. The contradiction is in the fact that Digital Natives are used to fast getting information, parallel processing, multitasking, they like hypertext, prefer games to serious work as well as they have little patience for lectures, “tell them, Digital Immigrants don’t value highly the abovementioned Natives’ skills and adhere to a serious, step-by-step, process of teaching and don’t believe in successful learning with fun.

Further studies of our topic [3], exploring the influence of digital technologies on the learning environment in higher education, prove that “learning characteristics of Gen Z are unique and different from other generations” [3, p. 5] and, therefore, require advanced digital technologies such as digital learning platforms, social media, mobile applications, digital content learning, Visual Learning Environment, etc.

It is also stated that universities, striving for ‘student-centered approach’, support a blended method of learning in which digital technologies are integrated together with traditional ones in 3 levels: low – with digital platform and face-to-face instructors; medium – platform plus social media, mobile devices and face-to face instructors; and high – digital platform and social media associated with mobile devices used in Virtual Learning Environment [5]. While adopting blended learning, one should take into account student’s age, location,

gender, and access to Internet especially since the level of students' digitalization, namely: access to digital media and devices, users' behavior, attitude towards digitalization differ a lot. Thus, digital inequalities may lead to limiting educational opportunities and insufficient participating in social life [6].

Teaching foreign languages for specific purposes at universities aims at preparing highly qualified specialists with a proper level of competences and skills that will make them successful in their future professional activity. Taking into consideration the abovementioned mental peculiarities of a today's student, referring to processing information, concentration of attention, memory functioning, incorporating digital technologies in the process of teaching and learning languages for specific purposes is sure to have educational advantages: it will engage students in interactive communication with a teacher and groupmates, developing necessary skills, including digital literacy.

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