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Have Contemporary Students Lost Their Identity? The Impact of New Technologies on Today's Education

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Abstract: The modern world and its fast-changing educational sector, influenced by constant technological advances, as well as the reforms and

requirements of the educational authorities, have brought an enormous impact on how languages are taught nowadays. This puts enormous pressure on teachers to design curricula that meet these new institutional expectations. In this sense, the world of education is no different from power relations existing in other institutions, with specific emphasis on the issues around the means of acquisition and production of knowledge. This study analyses the influence of students' involvement in social networking on their potential to learn. The specific focus is placed on how Facebook or Twitter has successfully redefined students' priorities through modifying their systems of values and stressing the importance of collecting "likes" and gaining virtual popularity. This research provides a profile of contemporary youth on the basis of questionnaires and interviews with numerous primary and secondary school teachers, as well as by using media sources – which are mainly responsible for shaping public image and opinion – from three quality Polish news magazines: *Newsweek*, *Wprost*, and *Polityka*. The author adopted the qualitative approach to the presented study and conducted a long-term analysis of the changing image of Polish learners, in order to comprehend the roots of the phenomenon presented and the various metaphorical names attached to them. Therefore, is the *zombie generation* the outcome of our own actions? Based on the study findings, specific pedagogic advice is offered. Specifically, when working with contemporary students, educators need to develop a completely new awareness in order to "update" their knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Key words: students, identity, contemporary, technologies, terms

Introduction

Complex as it is, globalisation – often understood as wide access to modern technologies and social media – constitutes a factor that easily distracts and discourages contemporary students from learning for numerous reasons, often taking control of their lives and thus becoming the major aspect of their

day-to-day existence. As far as the school environment is concerned, technology often tends to be misunderstood and limited to the use of multimedia projectors and whiteboards to show a video or play a song, rather than the use of various types of interactive platforms and software types that might enrich students' classes. Furthermore, social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram have become so influential that students tend to value online popularity much more than their individual education, thus redefining their values and prioritising online phenomena such as blogging, vlogging and patostreaming (defined as the type of a live internet broadcast which presents various forms of behaviour commonly referred to as social deviations, including violence and offensive language). As a result, multiple research questions appear, such as:

- What is the true role of modern technologies in education?
- What are the consequences of the online phenomena mentioned above?
- How have students been viewed and therefore profiled by the media over the last two years, including rapid advances in modern technologies?
- How does the media profile contrast with the views expressed by professional teachers?
- How does the traditional methodological profile differ from the profile of the contemporary student, who is largely influenced by technological novelties and online opportunities?

This article is an attempt to provide a thorough scientific discussion regarding the questions posed above, however, it extends its analysis to a much wider spectrum. It also aims to cast light on the power relations that exist between new technological developments and the student-teacher relationship.

It consists of two parts; the initial one provides the reader with the theoretical background of the concept of a contemporary student, and thus enables the reader to understand who a learner is and which traits are usually associated with them. The empirical part of this research, on the other hand, presents numerous findings regarding the media profile of contemporary

learners as presented by three Polish quality magazines (*Newsweek*, *Polityka*, *Wprost*). This is then contrasted with the results of the questionnaire designed by the author and distributed among a group of professional teachers. This instrument allowed the researcher to contrast the detailed media profile – containing distinct characteristics and technological aspects of the modern learners – with the viewpoints of interlocutors working with their students on a daily basis. Additionally, the author aimed to contrast the above-mentioned points with traditional assumptions described in various methodological publications, in order to investigate how modern students differ from their idealised reflections. The article ends with a number of valuable conclusions and implications for future research on this topic.

The traditional learner profile

In order to proceed to the analysis of the contemporary profile of learners, it is necessary to consider the traditional viewpoints provided by numerous researchers in the professional literature.

To start with, Biedroń (2012) defines learners as individuals who possess various levels of individual variables which are responsible for differences among them. Furthermore, Majer (2010) maintains that learners are unique individuals who develop their systems of knowledge in multiple ways, often depending on a wide range of personal aspects. Ur (1991) claims that learners might be described as human beings to be directed by the teacher and whose potential needs to be activated through a number of approaches in order to maximise their learning experience. This viewpoint seems to be closely related to Harmer's (2001) definition, who pinpoints that learners are individuals possessing particular needs, abilities and competences to be processed and developed in an array of ways at particular stages of their educational development. Komorowska (2002) also expresses a similar view and adds that the selection of a suitable way of educating learners depends mostly on their age, and therefore on individual characteristics that might not yet be developed enough to enable them to use certain methods and techniques.

A slightly different definition comes from Figarski (2003), who claims that learners are simply the vital element of the glottodidactic process and, together with the teacher, constitute the core segments of any school community. Furthermore, learners ought to be provided with long-term goals and then required to achieve them by maintaining a particular level of motivation. Figarski (2003) also pinpoints that learners possess complex personalities which define their unique identities and allow them to maintain a certain degree of individualism. This view correlates with Lewicka's (2007) position regarding learners, who have been defined as active members of the glottodidactic process mentioned above, thus comprising an important element of the entire glottodidactic framework, including research on the topic.

Another interesting view comes from Wright (1987, pp. 117–118), who claims that there are 4 types of learners, i.e. *enthusiasts*, who treat their goals seriously and regard the teacher as their leader; *oraculars*, who also value the teacher, but tend to focus on individual satisfaction from established goals; *participants*, who attempt to focus their attention on both individual and group goals; and finally *rebels*, who willingly cooperate with a particular group and try to use its members for their own purpose. This taxonomy seems to be more influential since it allows the teacher to have a closer look at their learners and therefore establish their major goals and assumptions in terms of learning and approaching individual education.

Complex as the phenomenon of education is, there are many other definitions that provide useful explanations regarding learners and their attitude to education. When it comes to professional literature, however, all of them share a certain degree of similarity. Therefore, Douglas-Brown (2000, 2007) claims that learners are members of the school environment who need to be provided with a proper stimulus in order to absorb knowledge and develop their individual competence. However, they still seem to be emotionally unstable and thus prone to multiple behavioural changes, often resulting from difficulties or inabilities to cope with the target material. As far as Krzeszowski's (1997) view is concerned, learners ought to be defined as bearers of axiological values contained in their utterances, which allow them to evaluate how something has been encoded in terms of the intended message. On the other hand, Dörnyei

(2005), Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) and Ushioda and Dörnyei (2017), develop a much more comprehensive image of students and maintain that they are active participants in the educational process, ready for numerous challenges in the competitive, globalised world, and thus possessing multiple individual characteristics responsible for effective language learning. Furthermore, You, Dörnyei and Csizér (2016) and Muir, Dörnyei and Adolphs (2021) maintain that learners are those participants of the educational process that need role models and actively seek them to construct their individual L2 selves. Dörnyei (2009) and Dörnyei and Chan (2013, p. 439) claim that learners ought to be defined as strong motivation seekers, whose “intensity of motivation is partly dependent on their capability to generate mental imagery.” Finally, Adolphs et al. (2018, pp. 173–174) maintain that learners constitute a group of people who intensify their efforts to implement the latest technological advances into their own education, and this aims to “digitally manipulate mental images,” improve their level of language proficiency and increase language learning motivation. This viewpoint is also maintained by Tseng, Dörnyei and Schmitt (2006), Muir and Dörnyei (2013) as well as Henry, Davydenko and Dörnyei (2015) who claim that learners have a tendency to be driven by Directed Motivational Currents, i.e., periods of time when motivation is so intense that they work much faster and more effectively when dealing with particular tasks. They also become more self-directed and goal-oriented in order to achieve their goals.

Summing up, the definitions and explanations mentioned above aim to provide the reader with basic knowledge regarding the traditional concept of learners in the professional literature. However, it needs to be remembered that apart from the ones mentioned above, there is still myriad of other possible ways of depicting students, which usually share common characteristics and bear a high degree of resemblance. That is why, in order to reveal and describe the potential changes that seem to have taken place in the traditional profile of a learner over recent years, it is necessary to analyse the impact of the changing times and the most recent discoveries regarding learners, who seem to be highly influenced by the emergence of modern technologies which are the consequence of rapid advances in the fast-progressing process of globalisation.

Aims of the research

The study outlined in the presented paper aims to investigate and therefore conduct a thorough analysis of the profile of a contemporary learner, as created and developed by the media over the last two years and mainly due to the growing impact of globalisation and the rapid growth of social networking sites. Furthermore, the author intended to contrast the media profile with the opinions and views of professional interlocutors as regards contemporary learners and the entire school environment, who are often significantly influenced by and even required to implement various forms of modern technologies. Therefore, the presented paper aims to shed new light on the fact that, in this heyday of technological improvements and their inevitable impact on young people, the methodological profile of a learner – which is often static and contains an idealised set of qualities that teachers wished their students had – may considerably differ from the dynamically progressive media profile, which already contains the most recent updates as regards the impact of modern technologies and social networking sites.

Methodology

For the purpose of reliability, the author decided to make use of a variety of methods. To start with, the analytical method was implemented in order to conduct a thorough investigation of the media profile developed by three Polish quality news magazines: *Newsweek*, *Polityka*, and *Wprost*. The approach adopted allowed the researcher to identify a myriad qualities assigned to contemporary primary-, middle-, and secondary-school students, including all of the factors responsible for their changes. Furthermore, the author applied the contrastive method, in order to contrast media coverage regarding technologically-driven learners and their interlocutors' viewpoint, as well as the comparative method which was aimed at comparing the views and opinions expressed by the teachers participating in the study. Additionally, the individual case analysis method was applied in order to focus on each interlocutor individually and

therefore investigate the roots of the discussed phenomenon. Finally, the author made use of scientific discussion and thus reached particular conclusions accounting for the subject investigated in this paper.

Instruments and procedure

As far as the instruments of the study are concerned, the author made use of a total of 283 issues of three Polish quality magazines, i.e. *Newsweek*, *Polityka*, and *Wprost*, which were published from December 2016 to October 2018. This, in turn, allowed the researcher to create a profile of contemporary learners on the basis of a long-term analysis, that included numerous changes and their impact on the research subjects over a long period of time. Furthermore, the researcher designed a questionnaire aimed at contrasting the media profile with the numerous viewpoints of professional interlocutors who had been teaching different subjects and working in the school environment for a certain number of years. Additionally, differences in the length of working in schools enabled the author to obtain a wide range of opinions, understood as the viewpoints expressed by teachers who have just started their career paths as well as those who have been members of the educational sector for many years. Consequently, the author divided the study into two parts. First, the analysis of the media profile was conducted. Then the author contrasted the profile with the views and opinions maintained by the participants of the study, in order to reveal the extent to which the media and the teaching staff maintained a united front.

Participants

127 professional instructors agreed to participate in the research discussed in this paper. 54 interlocutors (42%) represented primary schools, while 73 of them (58%) came from various secondary schools around the area of the Łódzkie voivodeship in central Poland. As far as this research is concerned, different levels of education ensured a significant degree of variety and the possibility of

contrasting and analysing the impact of technological changes and enhancements both in the primary and secondary sectors. Regarding the age and therefore experience of the participants, there were 17 teachers (13%) aged 25–30 and 21 teachers (17%) aged 31–35, thus regarded as still being at the initial stage of their teaching career and possessing no more than 10 years of experience. The largest group of participants, however, i.e. 38 teachers (30%), were those aged 36–40. The remaining groups included 19 interlocutors aged 41–45 (15%), 29 teachers (23%) aged 46–50, and only 3 teachers (2%) aged 51–57, who were getting ready to retire at the moment the research was conducted. Therefore, the experience of the participants ranged from 1 to as many as 33 years of teaching, which means that the study allowed for differences between various generations of instructors and their viewpoints regarding education over the last 30 years.

When it comes to the subjects taught by the respondents on a regular basis, there were 62 teachers of languages (49%) and 65 instructors (51%) dealing with other subjects, which will be mentioned in detail in the following part of the description. As far as humanities subjects are concerned, 82 teachers (65%) represented this area of the school curriculum, teaching such subjects as Polish (31 teachers – 24%), English (22 teachers – 18%), German (9 teachers – 7%), history (15 teachers – 12%), religious instruction (3 teachers – 2%) and civics (2 teachers – 1%). 45 tutors (35%) dealt with scientific subjects, such as geography (11 teachers – 9%), mathematics (19 teachers – 15%), biology (6 teachers – 5%), chemistry (5 teachers – 4%) and physics (4 teachers – 3%). As a result, the variety of instructors and their professional fields presented above allowed the author to base the entire research on an array of interesting factors, come to numerous conclusions and shed new light on how contemporary learners, often influenced by modern technologies, ought to be approached in the modern educational environment.

Findings and discussion

Part I: the media profile

Due to the nature of the presented paper, the author divides the results into two parts. Therefore, this section establishes the media profile according to

283 issues of the three selected Polish quality magazines, namely *Newsweek*, *Polityka*, and *Wprost*. This will be followed by the results of the questionnaire designed by the author.

According to the media, contemporary learners can have many nicknames that easily express their nature and willingness to make use of technological novelties. As a result, the following might be used¹:

- *cyber-youth* – mainly due to the growing number of applications and social networking sites that young people decide to use, including the amount of time they spend looking at the screens of their devices (Cieśla, 2017);
- *e-migrants* – an idea related to the phenomenon of moving one's personal life almost entirely to the digital world, understood as living for the Internet; e-migrants tend to get stressed and nervous more often and more easily (Cieśla, 2017);
- *street zombies* or *contemporary zombies* – a phrase used to describe students who do not pay attention to anything happening around them when going down the street, often crossing busy junctions unconsciously without maintaining any eye-contact with other members of society, thus leading to or even provoking dangerous and unexpected situations (Walewski, 2018);
- *leaning heads* – they tend to look at the displays of their mobile phones all the time, thus leaning their heads and maintaining the same position for a long time (Walewski, 2018);
- *neuro-tribe* – a term used to describe highly educated and very intelligent people who, however, are unable to communicate normally due to serious deficits in social skills, mostly as a consequence of overusing modern technologies (Sowa, 2018);

1 All of them have been translated from Polish to English, and different nicknames can be used in English-speaking countries.

- *smartphoholics* – a term that refers mostly to the fact that young people find it really difficult to function effectively without their smartphones, tablets, or phablets for a longer period of time (Sowa, 2018);
- *like-collectors* – these are people who have difficulties distinguishing fiction from reality; they seem to possess few real friends and little knowledge on different topics (Sadowski, 2017).

Considering all the above-presented terms and phrases, the growing impact of technological enhancements and the need to become respected and recognised online have led to the phenomenon that might be referred to through the use of the following names:

- *The Generation of Zombies (Generation-Z)*, describing people who are interested exclusively in their smartphones and do not assign any true value to real-life relationships, thus feeling no need to maintain any eye-contact with other people and aiming at exchanging necessary information briefly. Furthermore, virtual challenges become vital for them, while staying online 24/7 is a priority. According to a Newsweek report from January 2018, 99.3% of contemporary students never log out of social networking sites or any other forms of online membership (Świąchowicz, 2018);
- *The Generation of “get the chance,”* referring to people who tend to be very ambitious and often follow numerous role models, such as Elon Musk or Steve Jobs among others (Tomczuk, 2018);
- *Generation C(onnected)*, referring to students who face difficulties when functioning without the Internet and having no access to the virtual world and its resources (Sadowski, 2017).

Numerous reasons seem to stand behind the above-mentioned terms, phrases and names which resemble the current situation in schools. As a result, the fundamental questions appear: why are students changing so much nowadays? Why do they tend to rely mostly on technology-related issues? The answer to this question is quite complex and needs to be based

on a trichotomy of technological, social, and administrative reasons. However, for the purpose of this study, technological reasons are regarded as a separate entity, as opposed to social and administrative reasons that need to be discussed together due to their common roots and nature. There are also other consequences of technological enhancements, which will be discussed as a separate section related to the facilitative nature of the globalisation process.

When it comes to technological reasons, the Internet seems to have become an addictive tool for young people, who constantly feel the need to remain online and respond to various forms of online activities. In other words, they become internet-addicted to the extent that living without access to the web tends to be viewed as difficult or even impossible. Furthermore, the Internet offers a multitude of blogs and vlogs that often deal with ridiculous stuff and gain enormous popularity due to their specific character. It is often connected with the fact that the more controversial something becomes, the more popularity and “likes” it gets. In consequence, influencers are offered numerous forms of sponsorship and lucrative contracts from prestigious companies, such as clothes or cosmetics manufacturers, mainly in order to advertise their products and thus earn money. Confusing as it is, lots of young people prefer to follow that kind of media and regard education as an unnecessary product of the developing civilization (Żelazińska, 2018b).

However, when discussing technological reasons, a researcher cannot forget about the impact of social networking sites, which have become so popular and influential nowadays that young people often strive for virtual popularity in order to become successful in life and well-known in various communities. That is why, whether it be Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, or Snapchat, collecting “likes” upvotes or positive comments tends to be the leading activity of young students, often establishing one's position in a particular group of people. Furthermore, the above-described situation has clearly contributed to another contemporary phenomenon, i.e. the *Instagramization of society*, which might be explained by the fact that pressure for the use of social media is constantly growing, while having an account on one of the networking sites has become a priority in the contemporary world. Consequently, those who reject the use of any form of the above-presented media tend to be regarded as

non-existent or outdated and are therefore kept at a distance or even rejected by the group (Żelazińska, 2018b).

Another social phenomenon, characteristic of the 21st century, can be referred to as *patostreaming*. In other words, patostreamers are people who record video blogs about current affairs and day-to-day matters, often criticising or discussing them in a controversial and socially unacceptable way using multiple colloquial expressions or simplified lexis. Unfortunately, the scope of this phenomenon is constantly increasing since some of the most popular patostreamers have more than 250,000 followers and subscribers. Therefore, their influence seems to be remarkable, which, in turn, reveals that the priorities of contemporary learners have changed significantly, while the value of education has dropped. Patostreaming tends to be influential due to its content and the controversial way of discussing multiple issues, however, which possess no true scientific, educational or social value. Nevertheless, if a patostreamer and their video blog have thousands of followers, there are definitely more benefits than drawbacks, as earning a lot of money becomes only a matter of time. Unacceptable as the phenomenon might be, numerous patostreamers do not need education to succeed in their lives (Żelazińska, 2018a).

Apart from technological reasons, contemporary learners tend to be influenced by a wide range of other factors, mostly related to social and administrative issues. To start with, the speed of modern life and the globalisation process lead to the fact that young people easily get lost due to multiple and simultaneous changes of various kinds, often being provided with little time to adapt to them. Furthermore, contemporary learners are becoming more and more aware of the fact that certain dysfunctions, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia, each of them having a huge impact on the outcome of the learning process, might be easily used to their own advantage and thus enable them to obtain higher scores in various forms of examination. Nowadays, numerous school phobias and dysfunctions are no longer treated as serious problems, whose direct impact on a learner ought to be eliminated or at least diminished, but they are rather regarded as factors that are supposed to facilitate learners' scores and help obtain better marks in an effortless way. Confusing as it tends to be, contemporary learners are

much more aware of different legal regulations and educational gaps that might bring certain benefits to them. Additionally, they seem to know their individual rights to the extent that they know when to use them in order to protect themselves in certain situations.

When it comes to individual students, *home-schooling* is also becoming a more attractive opportunity in the modern education system. It is often referred to as the third sector of education, since parents may simply decide not to send their children to a regular school and then educate them themselves, usually for as long as they are able to provide them with the necessary knowledge. However, few parents treat home-schooling seriously since it may have numerous drawbacks and requires particular sacrifices from all family members.

In the contemporary school environment, most learners feel the need to belong to particular groups and therefore be guided by their leaders, instead of taking decisions themselves or defending their opinions and constituting independent social units. In other words, students have a tendency to become conformists and therefore accept and obey the rules, values and norms in a particular community. Furthermore, students tend to learn mechanically and often follow the rule of *learn-pass-forget*. This is mainly due to overloaded schedules and curricula, which usually include additional European Union programs and projects which take place even at weekends. As a result, ambitious students get exhausted more easily, which often leads to failure in particular subjects resulting mainly from the inability to cope with all the tasks at the same time. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the complexity of educational regulations often contributes to frequent changes of teachers and, in consequence, of teaching styles. This, in turn, requires students to adapt to different approaches and forms of conducting classes, which usually takes a lot of time and brings rather negative effects.

The above-presented arguments seem to have led to a multitude of additional consequences related to the three areas mentioned in this paper so far. First of all, contemporary students seem to be the victims of new reforms, constant changes, new forms of examination and, altogether, a certain kind of educational *deformation*. As a result, they usually need more psychological

and pedagogical counselling than even a couple of years ago. Furthermore, cooperation between teachers and parents fails at almost any possible level due to contradictory expectations and opinions regarding certain segments of education and their true value. Parents tend to impose more duties on interlocutors and seem to expect them not only to educate their children but also, to some extent, bring them up and solve their problems, thus avoiding uncomfortable or conflicting situations at home. This, in turn, leads to the fact that children feel comfortable living in their private worlds and do not need to become adults sooner than they really have to. It is also important to remember that the mentality of young people is constantly changing, thus redefining their priorities and bringing tangible benefits. In order to make it clear, Erasmus programs might be considered, since children seem to attend them to get extra pocket money rather than professional experience or an opportunity to learn new skills and languages. Finally, due to the fact that contemporary students have to be prepared to work and live in a fast-changing economic environment, mainly by adjusting Polish schools to the requirements of the European Union and various international models, private schooling is becoming more popular due to its more flexible curricula and schedules, usually offering students a possibility of choosing their optional subjects without imposing anything extra on them. This reveals that fee-dependent schooling may soon become serious competition for state-governed institutions (Kim, & Szulc, 2018). Therefore, considering all the arguments described in this paper so far, another fundamental question appears: what are the consequences and thus the other side of using technology and social networking sites, including constant technological progress?

To start with, students are gradually becoming unable to communicate verbally face-to-face, which means that the level of their verbal skills has significantly diminished due to the growing influence of technology. These days, students tend to communicate mostly via the Internet and social media, thus becoming accustomed to short and simple messages, usually containing limited content and lacking proper linguistic values. Furthermore, students seem to lose their identities and often follow patostreamers, vloggers and bloggers, described in greater detail in the previous sections of this paper.

As a result, levels of tolerance are falling due to the fact that students are fighting for online popularity, while social skills and functioning in society is becoming increasingly difficult. In other words, technology seems to be widening the gap between individuals, i.e. new gadgets are becoming symbols of membership in particular groups, excluding those ones who cannot afford to buy technological novelties. As a result, they seem to be treated as *social outlaws* (Żelazińska, 2018a).

Another major factor related to the influence of technology is the fact that the writing skills of all age groups are significantly decreasing, while the verbalisation of thoughts seems to be more and more problematic. What is more, the Internet has become the most powerful stimulus for students, who tend to remain at least 6 hours online per day on average. This seems to be a clear outcome of civilisational changes, which then defines being available on social networking sites and remaining an up-to-date member of society as obligatory. Finally, it is worth mentioning that new lexis is emerging due to constant changes and the growing impact of the social dimension of the Internet. However, since it generally relates to online phenomena and their accompanying features, this is usually abstract for those who reject social networking sites. Żelazińska (2018b) maintains that some of the English examples include such items as *drelfie* (a selfie of someone being drunk), *shoefie* (a selfie of someone wearing new shoes), *shelfie* (a selfie of someone with a bookshelf in the background), or *belfie* (a selfie of someone presenting their buttocks). Confusing as it is, Polish also contains innovative items which are becoming more and more common among young people; some examples include *bajera* (a smart talk, usually to ask somebody out), *rozkminiać* (to attempt to understand something), *przypať* (a problematic situation), or *ogarnąć się* (to calm down and start to think logically). All these newly-invented items are then made use of on social networking sites, thus making communication increasingly ambiguous and often inaccessible for a person from outside a particular community. Additionally, according to Żelazińska (2018b), it is worth mentioning that Snapchat has become the major social platform for primary school pupils, as opposed to secondary schools which are dominated by Instagram and therefore the need to share and comment on photos.

Part II: the questionnaire

In order to verify the media profile presented above, the author distributed a questionnaire among 127 professional interlocutors, mainly to contrast the information provided by the media and that from teachers working in the profession for years. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions of various kinds, often allowing the subjects to choose more than one option, and aimed to investigate whether professional interlocutors confirmed the information delivered by the media.

To start with, the author investigated if the respondents favoured the use of modern technologies, especially in educational contexts. As a result, 52.8% of them (67 subjects) considered technologies to be a positive phenomenon, as opposed to 47.2% of the teachers (60 subjects), who maintained that technologies were useless and even interrupted the process of conveying knowledge to students. However, the discrepancy between the results might be defined as rather marginal and thus reveals that the attitude to modern technologies is almost equally balanced.

When asked about how modern technologies influence the way students approach various school subjects when working with them during their classes – especially when compared to education a decade ago – 32.3% of the respondents (41 subjects) pinpointed that technologies have made their work easier and allow them to cover more material within a single class. Furthermore, 24.4% of the teachers (31 subjects) maintained that technologies do not have any serious impact on how they work during their classes and defined them as rather useless. These were mostly teachers of subjects such as history, mathematics or chemistry (23 out of the 31 mentioned above – 74%), who clearly opted for the traditional way of teaching, thus rejecting innovative solutions and modern approaches. It is also worth mentioning that no teacher of foreign languages claimed technologies to be useless and therefore unnecessary in the classroom. This allows the researcher to claim that foreign language teaching, so popular and widespread nowadays, tends to remain up-to-date and favours the use of innovative platforms and software types in order to ensure a more effective and efficient flow of knowledge. Another

group of teachers, i.e. 22% (28 subjects), stated that technology constitutes a factor that aims to maintain students' attention in order to conduct classes at all. The respondents added that teaching at the time of social networking sites and online dominance requires interlocutors to adopt various approaches, even unfavoured ones. Finally, 12.6% of the teachers (16 subjects) pinpointed that technologies tend to influence their subjects in an insignificant way, thus deserving no special attention, while 8.7% (11 subjects) claimed that education is constantly changing and modern technologies are nothing else but a consequence of this development.

When it comes to the influence of modern technologies on education and students' skills, 48% of the respondents (61 subjects) maintained that they significantly diminish their verbal skills and literacy, leading to problematic situations after a longer period of time. As far as more positive feedback is concerned, 24 subjects (18.9%) claimed that technologies might be defined as the future of education and a sign of social advancement. Furthermore, 19 subjects (15%) admitted that technologies ought to be applied carefully in order not to allow them to dominate the target classes and therefore begin to rely on them in every single aspect. However, some of the respondents, i.e. 9.4% (12 subjects), did not have their own opinion regarding technologies and their impact on contemporary learners. Finally, 8.7% of the participants (11 subjects) maintained that modern technologies seemed to develop their learners' skills and creativity. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that none of the subjects defined technology as an unnecessary element of education that ought to be avoided at any cost. Subsequently, the respondents were asked about the frequency of using modern technologies in the classroom. 101 subjects (79.5%) declared that they use them once or twice a week, while only 12 of them (9.5%) felt the need to use them between three to five times per week. However, 14 teachers (11%) maintained that they used technologies as often as they could in order to facilitate their classes and make their students more willing to attend them regularly. Furthermore, in order to get wider knowledge on the topic, the author asked the respondents to state if technologies attract their students' attention in a way that the classes became more fluent and effective, thus allowing students to attend them more willingly. As a result,

55 teachers (43.3%) claimed that modern technologies do not necessarily constitute an aspect that facilitates their classes, providing numerous explanations regarding their viewpoints. Furthermore, 22 interlocutors (17.4%) stated that they only sometimes see the positive impact of the use of technologies at school, while 13 subjects (10.2%) saw no difference at all and rejected modern equipment in their individual teaching environments, thus encouraging the traditional way of dealing with the intended educational material. As far as the opposite viewpoint is concerned, only 37 subjects (29.1%) pinpointed that technologies facilitate their classes and allow them to draw students' attention to the vital aspects of each lesson, while at the same time contributing to the effectiveness of the learning and teaching process.

Complex as it is, respondents were then asked to declare the factors that they would immediately eliminate from the school environment in order to facilitate their classes and thus make them more effective and flexible. As a result, 89 teachers (70.1%) claimed that the use of social networking sites ought to be limited to an absolute minimum or even abandoned at all. What is more, 113 interlocutors (89%) stressed the fact that various electronic gadgets are the most intrusive element, often discouraging students from active participation in their classes and thus limiting the efficiency of the knowledge absorbed. Gadgets tend to be ubiquitous in every aspect not only of young people's lives, but also those of adolescents and adults. They enable to stay online 24/7 and live another, often more important life, in virtual reality. As far as the other factors are concerned, 31 subjects (24.4%) maintained that games and similar forms of entertainment ought to be limited in education, while only 15 subjects, i.e., 11.8% of all participants, rejected the use of the Internet, maintaining that the online medium often constitutes a valuable source of information and potential support not only among school learners but also members of society.

The following part of the questionnaire focused on a number of the individual features of contemporary students. In other words, the respondents were asked to determine the characteristics that, in their opinion, properly reflected the general approach of their students to education. Therefore, 97 subjects (76.4%) maintained that contemporary learners might

be described as *demanding*, mainly due to the fact that they expect a lot of time to be devoted to them and handed everything on a plate, often putting little or no effort into their individual development and being satisfied with the lowest passing grades. Furthermore, contemporary students seem to be much more aware of their individual rights and legal regulations in order to protect themselves in various uncomfortable or uncertain situations. Another group of participants, i.e. 77 subjects (60.6%), claimed that contemporary students seem to be *lost*, as there are too many changes and modifications taking place at the same time, which often give students little or no time to adapt to them and making them unable to get used to innovative forms of conducting classes as well as conveying and verifying knowledge. When it comes to being *indifferent*, 66 teachers (52%) declared this character trait to be the leading factor responsible for negative attitudes to school and any other forms of education. Finally, 47 interlocutors (37%) maintained that their learners were *undisciplined*, explaining their choice by the fact that young people seem to be in constant need of remaining online and therefore up-to-date with what is happening in their individual social circle, while at the same time being inattentive to the events taking place in the classroom. Finally, it is important to mention that none of the teachers claimed that their students were *systematic* and *dutiful*, even if resulting from the influence of technology or other factors accompanying the process of educating the youngsters.

When asked about students' interests, 88 subjects (69.3%) stressed the fact that many contemporary learners tend to have limited or even no passions and hobbies at all, which mainly stems from the fact that they select, follow and attempt to resemble inappropriate role models. In other words, students seem to be convinced that using modern technologies and therefore becoming patostreamers or vloggers may bring them more tangible benefits than studying for years and becoming – for example, an office worker – in order to climb up the career ladder and get a minimum salary guaranteed by the government. Only 39 teachers (30.7%) maintained that students seem to have their hobbies and passions defined to the extent that they easily defend their viewpoints and positions on particular topics. This part of the questionnaire was strictly connected with the following question regarding

the amount of parental control over the use of modern technologies, mainly in terms of social networking sites and the Internet itself. As a result, 106 subjects (83.5%) claimed that parents ought to monitor their children's online activity, not only to protect them, but also to avoid their offspring becoming addicted to social media and being unable to exist without access to the Internet.

Finally, the author asked the respondents to select the most appropriate social nicknames and phrases that might be used to describe young minds nowadays. Having an opportunity to choose more than one answer, 101 subjects (79.5%) referred to them as *smartphoholics*, 96 subjects (75.6%) declared them to be *the zombie generation*, which is especially important from the perspective of this paper, 92 subjects (72.4%) called them *the generation of leaning heads*, 87 subjects (68.5%) labelled them as *the neuro-tribe*, while 79 subjects (62.2%) called them *the cyber-youth*. None of the respondents described contemporary learners as *e-migrants*. However, each of the terms selected by the teachers participating in the study allows the major assumption of this paper to be maintained; i.e., the fact that the influence of modern technologies on young people seems to be enormous and constitutes an opportunity to escape to a different world where everything depends on their individual choices. At the same time, the more young people spend time online observing social networking sites and striving for popularity, the more they believe that education and knowledge are simply unnecessary to live an effortlessly successful life.

Table 1, presented below, summarises the results obtained from the questionnaire and thus makes it clear what the most frequent answers were:

Table 1. Results

Are you keen on using modern technologies in educational contexts?	
Yes, it is a positive phenomenon	No, it is a negative phenomenon
52.8% (67 subjects)	47.2% (60 subjects)

How do modern technologies influence the way students approach various school subjects?

32.3% (41 subjects) – technologies make work easier and allow to do more

24.4% (31 subjects) – no serious impact

22% (28 subjects) – technologies maintain students' attention and allow to conduct classes at all

12.6% (16 subjects) – insignificant impact

8.7% (11 subjects) – technologies are just a natural consequence of development

How do modern technologies impact students' education and skills?

48% (61 subjects) – they diminish verbal skills and literacy

18.9% (24 subjects) – they are the future of education

15% (19 subjects) – they ought to be applied carefully

9.4% (12 subjects) – no opinion

8.7% (11 subjects) – they develop learners' skills and literacy

0% (0 subjects) – they are unnecessary

How often do you make use of technologies in the classroom?

79.5% (101 subjects) – once or twice a week

11% (14 subjects) – from three to five times a week

9.5% (12 subjects) – as often as possible

Do you think technologies attract your students' attention and allow them to attend your classes more willingly?

43.3% (55 subjects) – not necessarily

17.4% (22 subjects) – sometimes only

10.2% (13 subjects) – there is no difference

29.1% (37 subjects) – yes, technologies are highly facilitative

What factors would you eliminate from the school environment to support students' individual uniqueness?	
70.1% (89 subjects) – social networking sites	
89% (113 subjects) – electronic gadgets	
24.4% (31 subjects) – games and game-similar forms of entertainment	
11.8% (15 subjects) – the Internet	
What individual characteristics do you think reflect and therefore describe contemporary students?	
76.4% (97 subjects) – demanding	
60.6% (77 subjects) – lost	
52% (66 subjects) – indifferent	
37% (47 subjects) – undisciplined	
0% (0 subjects) – systematic	
0% (0 subjects) – dutiful	
Do you think your students have any hobbies or interests?	
69.3% (88 subjects) – limited or no passions and hobbies	
30.7% (39 subjects) – hobbies and interests clearly developed	
Do you think parents ought to monitor how their children make use of modern technologies?	
Yes	No
83.5% (106 subjects)	16.5% (21 subjects)
What are the most appropriate nicknames that describe contemporary students / young minds?	
79.5% (101 subjects) – smartphoholics	
75.6% (96 subjects) – the generation of zombie	
72.4% (92 subjects) – the generation of leaning heads	
68.5% (87 subjects) – the neuro-tribe	
62.2% (79 subjects) – the cyber-youth	
0% (0 subjects) – e-migrants	

Conclusions

Students' engagement in social sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, exert pressure on educators in terms of designing teaching programmes that would be meaningful to students. However, as the study has shown, the expected changes do not result from positive incentives. Technological progress, which is of a dual nature, seems to be responsible for lowering students' skills both in terms of written and oral communication. Learners tend to be unable to express their thoughts and ideas on an everyday basis due to the fact that online communication tends to be brief and fragmentary, thus limiting to an absolute minimum the syntactic or semantic means to convey a message successfully. Consequently, the more time students spend online and communicate in this way, the more they seem to become illiterate and unable to speak or write in complex contexts.

Apart from diminishing students' oral and written skills, the use of technology facilitates the emergence of innovative words. However, this new lexis seems to be understandable only for the target group or community and is therefore useless in everyday life. Nevertheless, teachers who intend to work effectively with contemporary learners need to adopt some of the new items in order to comprehend their students and, consequently, be understood by them.

Furthermore, students seem to make use of this innovative lexis, i.e. nicknames, abbreviations and slang expressions, to encode their utterances and make them understandable only for their peers. Therefore, conversational maxims are intentionally deviated to succeed in the transfer of information. As far as the teacher's viewpoint is concerned, providing students with knowledge requires a lot of paraphrasing, contextualisation and additional explanations, since the use of technology clearly simplifies the way students verbalise their thoughts when interacting with others.

Since contemporary students and their way of thinking have changed a lot, they usually view modern technologies as a chance for a better life and an effortless income. Unfortunately, they seem to be unaware of the addictive side of technologies and their impact on life skills, which is why teachers and parents need to take responsibility for the way technological devices and novelties are used.

Furthermore, technology ought to be treated as a supplementary teaching aid in education, enabling teachers to facilitate the planning and organisation of their classes and giving students a sense of responsibility for learning. However, conducting classes based only on modern technologies seems to be pointless, or is even not recommended.

Undoubtedly, in reality contemporary learners differ significantly from how the professional literature depicts them. In consequence, in order to work successfully in any school environment, one needs to consider both the features of learners which are described in the professional literature, as well as those features that result from the times we live in. Inevitable as all the processes are, this is what teaching has truly become nowadays, and this research clearly reveals that the processes mentioned above are highly compatible with what the media image depicts.

Summary

Although understood and treated in various ways, technology constitutes an inseparable aspect of human progress and life. However, due to its growing impact in global society, there needs to be a certain degree of control on how to apply online resources in an appropriate way. As far as the educational sector is concerned, technologies either allow to support learning and individual development or simply diminish students' skills and make them unable to communicate outside of a particular group of people. That is why, being in charge of educating young people, teachers seem to have become the social group that needs to accept the impact of modern times and take certain steps in order to deal with technology's rapid spread.

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