Teacher-talk and Facebook: An enquiry into pedagogical and methodological expectations of GenZ EFL learners in Germany

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Introduction

This paper looks into the pedagogical and methodological expectations of Generation Z (GenZ) EFL learners in secondary and tertiary education in Germany. First, GenZ is discussed and a rationale for my research questions is provided. Then, I describe the context and methods used in this study before I present and discuss my results.

Background: Generation Z: local and supralocal context

GenZ is defined as the cohort born between 2000 and 2011, currently studying in the late secondary or tertiary educational sectors. They have grown up in a fully digitalised world (Chicioreanu & Amza, 2018), which means that they are used to constant exposure to visual stimuli and information. It may, therefore, be suggested that this cohort has an inherent need for the inclusion of technology and social media in education. In addition, Kinash et al. (2013) suggest that this exposure to stimuli may have altered GenZ's brain structure, leading to reduced attention span, which may, in turn, have impacted their ability to focus on teacher-centred lessons. Furhermore, Jensen (2019) suggests that due to this cohort's connectedness, they are diverse and tolerant, prefering collaboration over competition. A study conducted by the British Council (2019) in Germany further suggests that GenZ in Germany suffer from high levels of *angst* as they do not feel prepared for the requirements of the real world. They blame this on the outdated school system and educational structures in the country. This study seeks to find out more about the needs and expectations of this cohort by looking at the following two research questions:

1. 1. What do GenZ learners in Germany think about the inclusion of technology and social media in the L2 classroom?
2. 2. How do GenZ in Germany expect the role of their teachers to be to facilitate their learning?

Local Context & Participants

Data were collected in three federal states in Germany, from one *Realschule* (non-academic secondary branch), one *Gymnasium* (academic secondary branch) and one *Berufsfachschule* (vocational college). Originally, 100 participants had signed up for the study, however, due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, only 20 learners participated eventually. From this total number of participants, 13 attended a vocational college and seven attended secondary schools, with 6 participants volunteering to participate in the follow-up interviews.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach was chosen to allow for data triangulation (Dornyei, 2007). The selected data for this paper were harvested from a quantitative questionnaire containing 14 Likert-Scale items. Once the questionnaire was evaluated, follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with questions based on the questionnaire findings. Data collection was conducted between April and July 2020.

Results and Discussion

The first research question attempts to identify the preferences towards the inclusion of technology and social media in the EFL classroom. The questionnaire results can be seen in Table 1 below. It must be noticed that the majority of participants find the consumption of authentic English content (e.g. YouTube clips) and the application of the language in these contexts highly motivating (80.0% and 72.5%, respectively). At the same time, learners appear to be averse to the idea of incorporating digital devices, such as their smartphones, and social media, such as their private Instagram or Facebook accounts, into the active EFL lesson.

Table 1

Questionnaire data: Technology and Social Media in the L2 classroom.

Questionnaire Item	Percentage of Agreement
Webservices and search engines are preferred for research.	87.5 %
Consumption of English content is highly motivating.	80.0 %
Opportunities to practise English in authentic, real-life situations.	72.5 %
Use of modern media can generally improve learning experience.	70.0 %
Digital tools (e.g. smartphones) should be used in the classroom.	37.5 %
Social media should be integrated into the classroom.	40.0 %
Online or remote groupwork projects are preferrable to in-person projects.	20.0 %

This is explained by Interviewee 6, who stated that:

"I would never use social media in class. For me it's a rather private thing I use in my free time […] and it needs to be segregated from school"

GenZ may be aware of the benefits of connecting with others online during leisure time, however they prefer not to do so in class for privacy reasons. Furthermore, GenZ do not seem to use many paper-based resources, instead they resort to online search engines for research (87.5%). This indicates that a one-size-fits-all approach using contrived audio-visual teaching materials may be detrimental to the learners' experience. Instead, a more individualised approach to materials, including online resources of interest, access to online search engines and encyclopedias and the opportunity to exchange language via social media in unmonitored contexts may be beneficial for GenZ's language learning experience.

The second research questions attempts to ascertain how learners see their teachers. The questionnaire results can be seen in Table 2 below. Interestingly, the learners seem to rely on their teachers for feedback, whilst the teacher is not perceived as a source of motivation per se (95.0% and 20.0%, respectively). In addition, the teacher is still seen as an authority figure (65.0%), however, this transpired more in the role of setting goals (65.0%) and being a source of information (60.0%).

Table 2.

Questionnaire data: Teacher Roles.

Questionnaire Item	Percentage of Agreement
Teacher feedback is important.	95.0 %
Interactive groupwork is preferred over teacher-centred instructions.	80.0 %
The teacher's job is to provide guidance whilst learners discover contents.	75.0 %
The teacher's job is to set clear learning goals.	65.0 %
The teacher is an authority figure.	65.0 %
Teachers are the most reliable source of information.	60.0 %
Teachers actively motivate me to improve in English.	20.0 %

It can be seen that teacher-centred lessons are less favoured by GenZ learners, who prefer interactive groupwork (80.0%). This may be corroborated by the result that learners require teacher guidance, whilst exploring contents (75.0). These suggestions have been confirmed by the interviews, with all six participants stating that groupwork enables them to explore content and decreases teacher-talk, whilst increasing opportunities to socialise. This underlines the need for self-agency and highlights the social aspect of language learning and use. Interviewee 1 corroborates this by stating:

"I think this whole 'I stand up front and just read my stuff and don't really let the students participate…' I think it should be turned down […] I think the students should engage more […]"

Hence, it can be argued that GenZ require a shift in focus, away from the teacher and towards the students. They require freedom to engage with materials and collaborate on their exploratory quest through the content. At the same time, they appreciate the teacher's guidance and feedback. This would transform the role of the teacher from emitter to the transmitter of information.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the stance of GenZ towards technology and social media in the classroom and at further defining the role of the teacher in a GenZ classroom. GenZ learners do utilise social media and technology to use English, however surprisingly,

they do not wish to include these explicitly in formal instructions in the EFL classroom. This is mainly due to privacy concerns and because social media is considered a free-time activity. Furthermore, it can be suggested that the teacher is seen as a safety net or a passive guide who should give learners the freedom to collaboratively explore contents on their own..

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