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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Pedagogically driven digital education for diverse people and deeper partnerships

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The digital era has ushered in a new set of skills/competencies that both teachers and students need to acquire in order to thrive in their academic/professional pursuits. Digital literacy has become a crucial aspect of education, particularly in higher education where teachers and students are expected to engage with digital resources/tools on a regular basis. This shift has irrevocably changed the face of education and digital literacy has evolved to be more than just the ability to use digital tools — it now encompasses the critical skills/competencies that require teachers and students to navigate, analyse, and create information within the digital space. Adopting the hexagonal socio-technical systems theory (University of Leeds, 2023), a pilot digitalised sailing theory course was launched for adult learners at both beginner and intermediate levels from 2022. Within a broadly interpretive approach (Erickson, 1998), the analysis of the feedback involved the refinement of the major and common ideas (Mayring, 2000) held by the learners in their voluntary evaluation at the end of their course(s). The preliminary analysis highlighted two themes: pedagogically driven digital education accommodates diverse learners' needs and deeper partnerships are established for teacher and learners as well as among learners through a digitalised course. Majority of the learners expressed the benefits of coming into the practical sessions by “feeling you know something already” as they were able to complete the digitalised sailing theory course at their own pace (i.e., less overwhelming), with repetitions (i.e., consolidating individual learning) and evaluate their understanding via the quizzes that provide instant feedback (i.e., self-check). It is worth noting that the average score of the quizzes was 94% and 98% at both levels respectively. Hence, the learners' confidence/comfort levels were increased during the practical sessions and with that, it enhanced the positive learning experiences during the practical sessions. Most importantly, both teacher and learners found that the digitalised sailing theory course has helped to develop a deeper partnership between teacher-learners and among learners. This is particularly when the learners had already ‘met’ the teacher in the short videos and thus could ask targeted questions during the practical sessions. Very often, the questions turned into meaningful conversations between teacher-learners and among learners, addressing individual learning progress. As concluded by Deshmukh, et. al., (2022), such conversational discussions give the teacher opportunities to “provide challenge or support as needed” for the learners in a responsive manner. In short, the positive learners' feedback ensures that similar initiatives could be adopted in today's higher education when the curricula are developed digitally to support diverse students for deeper partnerships between teachers-students and among students, while serving as a mechanism to develop students as digitally literate citizens. After all, digital education is a spinoff opportunity arising from the global pandemic that could improve learning for all, including advances in people-orientated pedagogies and partnerships. But as the digital threads continue to weave their way through education, a critical question arises: Are we ready for digital education, especially when the level of digital literacy varies among teachers and students?

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