Let's talk about digital learners in the digital era

Eliana Esther Gallardo-Echenique  
Rovira i Virgili University

Luis Marqués-Molías  
Rovira i Virgili University

Mark Bullen  
University of British Columbia

Jan-Willem Strijbos  
Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich

DOI: https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v16i3.2196

Keywords: Digital learner, Digital natives, Millennials, Integrative literature review, Thematic analysis

Abstract
This paper reports on a literature review of the concept of “Digital Natives” and related terms. More specifically, it reports on the idea of a homogeneous generation of prolific and skilled users of digital technology born between 1980 and 1994. In all, 127 articles published between 1991 and 2014 were reviewed. On the basis of the findings, there appears to be no commonly-accepted definition of a “Digital Native”. The concept varies among individuals, societies, regions and nations, and also over time. Moreover, there are a number of variables other than age that may help us understand the nature of students’ use of digital technologies. The so-called “Digital Native” literature demonstrates that despite students’ high digital confidence and digital skills, their digital competence may be much lower than those of their “digital teachers”. Given the confusion surrounding “Digital Native” and its affiliates, we propose to unify them under the concept “digital learners”.

**Author Biography**

Eliana Esther Gallardo-Echenique, Rovira i Virgili University

Department of Pedagogy

**Table 2: Terms Used to Characterize Students in the Digital Era**

**HOW TO CITE**

As digital technologies and applications mature, we'll need to push new frontiers of discovery. This means we need to start preparing for a new era of innovation, one in which technologies such as genomics, materials science, and robotics rise to the fore. Just as we still use heavy industry but no longer say we live in the Industrial Era, in the future, we'll still use digital technologies. They just won't be the shiny new thing reshaping how business gets done. To understand how this will work, let's look at the Cancer Genome Atlas. Introduced in 2005, its mission was simply to sequence tumor genomes and put them online. To date, it has catalogued over 10,000 genomes across more than 30 cancer types and unlocked a deluge of innovations in cancer science. The so-called “Digital Native” literature demonstrates that despite students' high digital confidence and digital skills, their digital competence may be much lower than those of their “digital teachers”. Given the confusion surrounding “Digital Native” and its affiliates, we propose to unify them under the concept “digital learners”.

Discover the world’s research. 15+ million members.

Agree