

Role of Admired Teachers in Promoting Digital Innovation and Active Youth Participation among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The fast pace of digital technological growth has reshaped higher education opened new avenues for young people to take an active part in academic, social and community life (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2019). Undergraduate students today are expected not merely to acquire digital skills but to apply technology in creative, responsible and collaborative ways when addressing contemporary challenges. Within this context, teachers exert a strong influence on how students come to view digital innovation and active participation (Bandura, 1986). Among the many teachers a student encounters, certain individuals come to be admired for their subject expertise, teaching effectiveness, communication ability, motivation, emotional support, innovative practice and capacity to inspire. Such teachers can act as role models, encourage students to explore emerging technologies, take part in collaborative learning, engage in digital initiatives and contribute to social and community life. This paper examines the connections between admired teachers, digital innovation, student engagement, leadership, collaboration, creativity and responsible youth participation (Freire, 1970). It argues that admired teachers can function as catalysts in shaping digitally competent, innovative, socially responsible and actively engaged young citizens, and it closes by outlining implications for teachers, higher education institutions and teacher-education programmes.

Keywords: *Admired Teachers, Digital Innovation, Youth Participation, Digital Competence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education has been substantially reshaped by the rapid growth of digital technology. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence, online learning environments, social media, mobile applications and collaborative tools have altered how students learn, communicate, create and take part in society (OECD, 2019). Today's undergraduates are no longer viewed simply as recipients of information; they are expected to become active learners, innovators, problem-solvers, collaborators and responsible citizens (Freire, 1970).

Digital innovation in education is not limited to the use of technological devices. It also involves the creative application of digital tools to strengthen learning, communication, collaboration, problem-solving and social participation (European Commission, 2019). A teacher who shows genuine enthusiasm for learning, adopts innovative teaching practices, encourages experimentation and supports

students' ideas can become a powerful source of inspiration (Bandura, 1977).

An admired teacher shapes students not only through formal classroom instruction but also through personal example and ongoing encouragement (Bandura, 1986). Likewise, when teachers encourage participation in academic, social and community activities, they help cultivate active and responsible youth (Fraser, 2008).

The role of admired teachers therefore merits closer attention within the context of digital innovation and youth participation. Understanding this role can help higher education develop practices that combine technological competence with creativity, leadership, collaboration and social responsibility.

II. CONCEPT OF ADMIRED TEACHERS

Admired teachers possess qualities that inspire respect, trust and motivation in their students (Bandura 1986). Their strong grasp of subject matter,

paired with effective communication skills, allows them to explain complex ideas clearly and in an engaging way. Beyond academic expertise, they show empathy, patience and genuine concern for students' growth, which helps build a supportive learning environment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). They encourage critical thinking, creativity and independent learning while still upholding high standards and fairness. Their capacity to connect personally with students and adjust their teaching to suit diverse needs creates a positive classroom climate in which learners feel valued and empowered (Cornelius-White, 2007). Ultimately, admired teachers leave a lasting mark, shaping not only academic achievement but also the character and confidence of their students. An admired teacher, then, is one whom students respect, value and regard as a positive role model because of desirable personal and professional qualities (Bandura, 1986).

III. DIGITAL INNOVATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION & ACTIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Digital innovation in higher education refers to the integration and application of advanced digital technologies to strengthen teaching, learning, administration and research within universities and colleges (OECD, 2019). This includes tools such as online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, artificial intelligence, big data analytics and immersive technologies such as augmented and virtual reality. Such technologies enable personalized learning experiences, improve accessibility for diverse student populations and support flexible, remote models of education (European Commission, 2019). At its core, digital innovation involves using digital technologies creatively to develop new or improved ways of learning, communicating, solving problems and taking part in activities. It becomes truly meaningful when technology is used to raise the quality of learning and to help students become active creators rather than passive consumers of content.

Active youth participation refers to the meaningful involvement of young people in decision-making processes, community development and the social, political or educational activities that shape their lives (Fraser, 2008). It centres on empowering

youth to bring their perspectives, skills and energy to bear in shaping policies, programmes and initiatives (Freire, 1970). Such participation fosters responsibility, leadership and civic engagement, and it builds a sense of ownership and agency among young people. It also helps students to develop communication, leadership, teamwork, decision-making, problem-solving and social responsibility. Teachers can nurture this participation by giving students opportunities to voice their ideas, take on responsibility, collaborate with peers and engage with real-world problems (Giroux, 1988).

IV. ADMIRED TEACHERS PROMOTING DIGITAL INNOVATION

A) Teachers as Digital Role Models

Teachers who act as digital role models promote digital citizenship (safe and ethical use of technology) by active listening, privacy and ethical conduct online, preparing students to take part actively and responsibly in an increasingly digital society (European Commission, 2019). Students absorb lessons not only from what teachers say but also from what teachers do. When admired teachers use digital technologies with confidence, creativity and responsibility, they become models for their students to emulate (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

B) Encouraging Creativity and Innovation

Teachers play a key role by designing learning experiences that spark curiosity, open-ended problem solving and connections across disciplines (Giroux, 1988). Admired teachers who show empathy and tailor their methods to individual needs are also better positioned to support a wide range of creative talents, giving every student a genuine chance to innovate (Cornelius-White, 2007).

C) Developing Digital Confidence

Building digital confidence means cultivating the skills and mindset needed to navigate and use digital technologies effectively and safely (OECD, 2019). This is developed through regular practice with a range of digital tools, staying current with emerging technologies, and adopting a proactive attitude toward learning and problem-solving in digital settings (European Commission, 2019).

D) Promoting Responsible Digital Citizenship

Promoting responsible digital citizenship means encouraging people to use digital technologies

ethically, respectfully and thoughtfully within online communities (Ainscow, 2020). Its key elements include respectful communication, protecting one's own and others' privacy, recognizing and countering misinformation, and upholding legal and ethical standards when creating and sharing digital content.

V. ADMIRED TEACHERS IN PROMOTING ACTIVE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Motivation and Encouragement: Building motivation and encouragement into digital literacy initiatives ensures that students gain not only technical ability but also the enthusiasm and sense of responsibility needed for meaningful, confident participation in digital spaces (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Developing Leadership: Combining leadership development with digital confidence and responsible digital citizenship prepares students to lead ethically and competently across digital academic, professional and social settings, equipping them to motivate and support others while upholding integrity and inclusivity (Giroux, 1988).

Encouraging Community Engagement: When paired with digital confidence and motivation, this ensures students are not only capable of using digital tools but are also inspired to connect meaningfully with others, thereby strengthening social networks and collaborative learning across academic, professional and social settings (Fraser, 2008).

VI. ADMIRED TEACHERS AS CATALYSTS FOR YOUTH ACTION

A) Role Modeling: Teachers who demonstrate commitment, empathy and integrity give young people tangible examples to follow, encouraging them to take initiative within their communities (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

B) Empowerment: By building supportive environments that affirm students' voices and ideas, admired teachers foster confidence and agency, enabling youth to pursue goals that matter to them (Freire, 1970).

C) Mentorship and Guidance: Personalized encouragement and constructive feedback help young people work through challenges, build leadership skills and turn their aspirations into concrete action (Cornelius-White, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

D) Cultivating Critical Consciousness: By encouraging critical reflection on social issues, teachers help young people recognize injustice and motivate them to engage in transformative action (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988).

VII. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGITAL INNOVATION AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

A) Cognitive and Emotional Growth: Digital innovations such as educational apps, virtual reality and interactive platforms create stimulating environments that strengthen cognitive skills, including problem-solving, creativity and critical thinking (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

B) Social Identity and Self-Concept: Digital platforms provide spaces for self-presentation and identity exploration, allowing individuals to try out different roles and social personas.

C) Motivation and Agency: Digital innovation can empower users by giving them access to information, personalized feedback and goal-setting tools, which strengthens intrinsic motivation and a sense of personal agency — both important to personality maturation (OECD, 2019).

D) Challenges and Risks: Although digital innovation supports growth, it also brings challenges such as digital addiction, reduced face-to-face interaction and privacy concerns, all of which can affect personality traits linked to social behaviour and emotional regulation.

VIII. CHALLENGES

1. Admired teachers may struggle to keep pace with rapidly evolving digital tools and platforms, which can limit their ability to integrate digital innovation effectively into teaching and youth engagement (OECD, 2019).

2. Limited access to adequate technological infrastructure and digital resources within educational institutions can hinder teachers' efforts to promote digital innovation and support active participation (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

3. Sustaining meaningful personal connections while making use of digital tools is not easy; excessive reliance on technology may reduce opportunities for the mentorship and role modeling that inspire youth action (Cornelius-White, 2007).

4. Differences in students' access to technology and digital literacy can create disparities, making it harder for teachers to engage all students equitably in digital innovation initiatives (Florian, 2014; Ainscow, 2020).

IX. IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Faculty Development and Training: Institutions need to invest in ongoing professional development so that teachers' technological proficiency and pedagogical skills keep pace with the effective integration of digital tools (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Infrastructure Enhancement: Providing adequate technological resources, reliable internet access and digital platforms is essential to sustain innovative teaching and student engagement while easing resource constraints (Ainscow, 2020).

Inclusive Access and Digital Literacy: Higher education institutions should adopt strategies that close the digital divide by ensuring equitable access to devices and connectivity, alongside digital literacy training for both students and teachers, in order to foster inclusivity (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian, 2014; European Commission, 2019).

X. CONCLUSION

The influence of an admired teacher can encourage students to explore digital technologies, generate innovative ideas, take part in collaborative activities and take responsibility for addressing real-world problems (Freire, 1970). Through motivation, emotional support, effective communication and innovative teaching practices, such teachers help create an environment in which students become active participants in their own learning and in society more broadly (Bandura, 1986).

The influence of admired teachers is therefore not confined to the classroom. It can extend to shaping digitally confident, creative, collaborative, responsible and socially active young people (Giroux, 1988). Higher education institutions should recognize and reinforce this role by supporting

innovative teachers, providing digital infrastructure, creating opportunities for student participation, and weaving technology into meaningful social and educational experiences (OECD, 2019). Ultimately, admired teachers can act as catalysts for digital innovation and youth action, helping undergraduate students turn digital opportunities into meaningful educational, professional and social contributions.

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