

Teachers and Challenges of Digital Technology

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Historical changes in communication technology substantially affect the education system. Today's youth is fully dependent on digital technology and social networks. Until recently, students learned linearly, rationally mastering curriculum by reading. Digital environments offer great opportunities for developing education. Apart from entertainment, students use the media for educational purposes as they can find a lot of teaching materials on the Internet. Teachers must be aware of these generational shifts in order to adjust the dynamics of teaching as new generations of students require a faster change in teaching methods and forms of work. This paper quotes the results of the research on attitudes teachers in Croatia have towards the use of digital aids in classroom teaching. High percentage of respondents believe that digital technology helps in motivating students to work and adopt content and improves the quality of teaching educational content. Teachers are aware of the importance of digitization in teaching and express a positive attitude towards the utility of technological aids in teaching.

Keywords: digitization of teaching, mother tongue, multitasking, media culture, classroom teaching

Our students today are e-students living in an e-world that, like life, has its advantages and disadvantages. To be successful in their e-lives, they need competent e-teachers and e-lecturers who recognize and apply the most effective forms of learning.

Milović and Veža (2011, 76)

Introduction

The new generations of students differ from the previous ones, because they are growing up in the digital technology environment they require a different approach to teaching. Unlike their predecessors who had books as their basic source of information, to children born in the new millennium the basic

source of information is the internet. The so-called 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001)¹ have no problems in simultaneously performing multiple different activities simultaneously. Intent on fast access to required data, they mostly rely on current notifications.² Carr (2011) states that an intensive form of mental multitasking is required to move around the internet.

With regard to the 'literary language' of the printed media, the new media brings with them media languages, transforming a classic reader into a recipient who receives various messages. 'The internet and mobile phone generation face a language that is no longer a standard language but a shortened, encrypted language, with separate parts of the text actually abolishing all the current conceptions of the text. No texture is knit anymore, there is no main text, only remaining are self-contained structures of messages.' (Plevnik 2005, 31)

While multitasking allows the performance of various tasks, the concentration of young internet users is short and superficial. Their brain works differently so they need more motivation for learning. Teachers must be aware of these generational shifts in order to adjust the dynamics of teaching as new generations of students require a faster change in teaching methods and forms of work. To feel the need for learning, students should find the material interesting and useful, with a sufficient dose of fun. Jandrić (2015) emphasizes that technology is not an autonomous force, but rather a system that benefits people who control it. Teachers are faced with the transformation of their profile, moving from the role of the traditional and dominant source of knowledge into counsellors and guidance instructors. Fear of the loss of teacher's identity in the world of aggressive virtuality is not unreasonable. There is a question as how to maintain interaction with students in teaching, 'how to preserve professional dignity and resist converting a teacher's call into mere administration of the internet learning systems' (Žanić 2015, 24). Some scientists (Carr) believe teachers should not be afraid that the digitalization of teaching would endanger their position in the classroom: 'My

¹ In his article 'Sapiens Digital: From Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives to Digital Wisdom', Prensky (2001) has surpassed the initial division of media users into natives and immigrants, offering a new categorization by dividing digital users into 'skilled' (*digital skilness*), 'wise' (*digital wisdom*), and 'digital fools' (*digital stupidity*). Teaching staff who study the field of methodology with children should not belong to this third category (Labaš 2013).

² The connection of contemporary young generations with technology is described by numerous terms, such as *net generation*, *cyber-kids*, *generation M* (from English 'media'), and a popular moniker *homo zapiens* (Veen and Wrakking 2006), a connection of a Latin *homo* (man) and *zap-zap*, an onomatopoeia of the sound of a laser weapon, which in the transmitted meaning points to scanning information by looking at computer screens.

dear, I think the new technology has given more importance to your vocation without taking anything away, possibly allowing it to be used and transferred by the tools unimaginable until recently. It is, therefore, about enrichment, not about expropriation.' (Andreoli 2007, 24). Despite the enviable mastery of new technologies, educators should not allow children to be educated by the media, but by the school. The school teaches true values and develops the critical thinking of young people.

When it comes to adapting teaching to the interests of contemporary internet generations, Fullan and Langworthy (2014) maintain that educators do not have too many choices or options, can not choose between change and non-change, but need to think how they will react to change and what actions they will apply in teaching. Even in classroom teaching, it is unthinkable today to present teaching content without any presentation tools. Students increasingly require that their teachers have the knowledge of and can apply technology when presenting information and facts. Also, it is not uncommon for students to be more familiar with the technological achievements than their teachers, giving them a certain advantage when searching for content they are interested in. The teacher's word is no longer the only source of knowledge, but is replaced by a computer, internet, different web applications that often attract more of the students' attention. That is exactly the reason for raising the question of educating teachers in an informatics sense.

Are teachers educated enough and can they cope with the constant progress that technology provides them? What are their attitudes on the use of digital technology in teaching the mother tongue? Do they think their word is irreplaceable or is technology something that further enriches teaching? In this text we will try to answer these questions.

Croatian Language in the New Media Environment

The twenty-first century education is marked by major changes caused by the fast paced way of life and the influence of information and communication technology. Progress in the development of digital technology strongly influences today's children and the phenomenon of education, so we are not wrong to call the ICT a functional co-educator of the new age (Mlinarević and Brust Nemet 2012). In this context, the teaching field of media culture is of great importance in the education of media literate young people. The media culture can thus be figuratively called the fourth pillar of Croatian language teaching.

Lower class students are often more familiar with the capabilities of modern technology than their teachers who should be educating them about

media content. Unlike older teachers today's students are growing up in the world of new technologies.

As part of the individualization of the teaching process, good teachers strive to adapt the methods and forms of work to each student. If a person does not have the needed sensitivity for a particular student, no technology will help him. In addition to the modern furnishing of schools with technical aids and universal computerization we must not ignore a human factor. The process of teaching is not only a mechanical transfer of knowledge, but a multidisciplinary skill that requires knowledge, effort and creativity, resulting in a specific atmosphere in teaching. This atmosphere is not created by a computer but by a teacher with his students. 'Teachers and students create aura in their classrooms daily [...] In the era of technical playback over the internet, therefore, there is no need to be afraid of reducing the role of a teacher: the aura is unique and can only be created by a man. On the other hand, the internet definitely provides a level of access to information that no single being can reach. In order to get the best of the machine and man, therefore, the tasks that we put in front of them need to be balanced in a way that everybody does the one that is the best for them.' (Jandrić 2013, 14)

Teaching Media Culture

The basic functions of the media are information, education and entertainment. The media provide the opportunity for creative application in teaching Croatian language and Fine arts. Although media is used in education, media culture is not sufficiently represented in the school system.³ Students acquaint themselves with the world of media within the subject of the Croatian language, but this is a negligible number of hours per month as the mother tongue program is filled with content from the language, literature, language expression and extracurricular reading. Many methodists think that media culture should be an independent subject in the entire educational vertical.

The question is whether the teachers in the classroom and subject teaching are sufficiently educated and trained for this area. Because of the technical incompleteness of many schools, the teaching of media culture is not implemented systematically. The incompetence in teaching has over time resulted in the unsatisfactory state of media culture in schools that are mostly lagging behind modern trends of modern technology. But the situation is not

³ In the primary education system, media culture or media education is just indicated in the national school curriculum. While the elements of media culture can be found in the Teaching Curriculum and Program for Primary Schools, in the National Framework Curriculum media education is characterized as a cross-topic, optional subject, or an extracurricular activity.

much better in other European countries. The results of research on media education in thirty countries show the neglect of media education in primary education. UNESCO also emphasizes the need to develop media literacy with an emphasis on students' critical relationship to the media content that surrounds them. Still, in many European countries, media education is included in primary school programs. For example, in Austria, France and Germany, media culture is separated as an independent subject. The media are today audio-visual grammar of the new era (Gabelica 2012).

Digitalization in Teaching the Mother Tongue

The use of digital technology⁴ in teaching the mother tongue is ambiguous because the tasks of language teaching are the development of oral expression and communication skills; in the teaching of the initial reading and writing the tasks are exercises of graphomotors in writing letters and composing sentences. Some methodologists believe that the teacher's word is an irreplaceable source of knowledge, and digital technology an unnecessary additional component. Numerous studies have been carried out on the expediency of digital technology in teaching, and some authors have also looked at its effectiveness in teaching mother tongue. Klemše (2010) examined the attitudes of primary school teachers on the use of computers in the classroom. The results showed that teachers who own a computer in the classroom have a more positive view on its utility. Ljubešić (2009) looked at the experiences of the students of the final year of Croaticistics about the application of personal computers in teaching. Respondents indicated that their Croatian language teachers did not use a computer in teaching, and the vast majority thinks that it would be more interesting to adopt the content of language and literature by using a computer.

Rosen and Beck-Hill (2012) tested the influence of computer programs Time To Know on the reading and math skills of students in the fourth and fifth grade of an English primary school. They observed students' achievements in the controlled and experimental classes of two different schools during the school year. The study showed that respondents who used the computer program achieved significantly better results in reading and math skills. In addition, they were less absent from classes and their discipline was significantly better in comparison to the controlled group.

⁴ Digital technology does not only refer to physical devices but, in the broader sense, it encompasses all technology based on the principle of binary data reading – different computer programs, software and network tools.

The linguistic reality and the linguistic fact that actually exist in life practice reflect in the Croatian language we find on the global network, or the interwebs (Milinović and Nemeth-Jajić 2011). By reviewing the literature on digital technology in teaching, we can conclude that a relatively small number of studies is devoted to its advantages or weaknesses within the subject of the Croatian language, especially in classroom teaching. The most common are studies on the forms of application of technology in the teaching of language or literature of the subject teaching, but there is a lack of studies on the attitudes of teachers and lower grade students. There is a general prevailing public opinion that teachers oppose digital technology in teaching, not considering it too useful in comparison to traditional teaching methods.

Research Methodology

In 2016, we conducted research on the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language in the lower grades of primary school. The purpose of the research was to examine the attitudes of teachers on the use of digital aids, to identify possible differences in attitudes due to age and work experience, and to assess the frequency of use and teachers' self-assessment of their own competence to apply digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language. The research was conducted in fifteen primary schools in three counties: Lika-Senj, Zadar and Primorje-Gorski Kotar counties.⁵

Research Objectives

1. To determine the distribution of results with respect to the positive or negative attitude of teachers on the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.
2. To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes on the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language with regard to age.
3. To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes on applying digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language with regard to working experience.

⁵ The participant from the Lika-Senj County was the Elementary School (ES) Antun Gustav Matoš from Novalja, and from the Zadar County the ES Juraj Dalmatinac from Pag. All other schools are located in the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, namely: ES Trsat, Eugen Kumičić, Belveder, Kantrida, Gelsi, Brajda, San Nicolo, Pećine, Vladimir Gortan, Vežica (Rijeka), Sveti Matej (Viškovo), Zvonko Car (Crikvenica).

4. To determine the distribution of results on the frequency of use of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.
5. To determine the distribution of results on teachers' self-assessment on their own competence for the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.

Research Hypotheses

1. Teachers mostly have a positive attitude on applying digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.
2. There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of teachers on applying digital technology in teaching of the Croatian language in terms of age, showing younger teachers having more positive attitudes.
3. There is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes on the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language with regard to working experience, showing that teachers with less work experience have more positive attitudes.
4. Teachers use digital technology in teaching of the Croatian language several times a month.
5. The estimate is that teachers are quite qualified for the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.

Research Methods and Sample Survey

The survey was conducted in fifteen primary schools using a sample of 124 classroom teachers. For the purpose of research, data were collected by means of a questionnaire consisting of a total of eight questions. The first two questions included entering teachers' age and years of service. Next, there were a series of five questions that respondents answered by rounding out the answers that best describe their point of view. The last question was an open type, requiring a brief descriptive answer. The variables that emerged in the research are: teacher's attitude, teacher's self-assessment of own ability, the frequency of use of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language, the age and work experience of the teacher.

Methods of Data Collection and Processing

Prior to conducting the research, school principals were provided with questionnaires that class teachers had to complete within the next seven days. The collected data was organized and entered into the SPSS database. A multivariate data processing method was used in the research, according to

Table 1 The Teachers' Position on Application of Digital Technology in Adoption of the Content of the Croatian Language

Answer	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
Yes	109	87.9
No	15	12.1
Total	124	100.0

Mejovšek (2008), so that the variables are processed simultaneously to obtain a complete and accurate insight into the research problem. The nonparametric Chi-squared test was also used in the research.

Results and Discussion

The results were obtained by processing data in the SPSS system for statistical calculations. The first aim of the research was to focus on the relation of respondents to digital technology in teaching. The hypothesis was: Teachers mostly have a positive attitude on applying digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.

Do you Think the Application of Digital Technology Helps in the Adoption of the Content of the Croatian Language?

Using statistical data processing we concluded that most teachers have a positive attitude towards the use of digital technology in the teaching of Croatian language, and the hypothesis is fully accepted. Teachers in a large percentage (over 80%) consider that digital technology helps in adopting the content of mother tongue and motivating students. They agree (77%) that digital technology improves the quality of teaching the content of the Croatian language.⁶

For the other objective, we have tried to determine whether there are differences in teachers' attitudes with respect to age. In our case there were four independent groups, defined by age, at regular intervals. We tested whether there are differences with respect to the five questions posed in the questionnaire. The hypothesis was: There is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards the use of digital technology in the teaching

⁶ Some of the possible explanations can be seen in the teachers' short answers on their attitude towards digitization of teaching: 'It helps the teacher in making teaching more interesting. I believe digitization of teaching is necessary because the teaching must be in line with modern technological developments. I believe that digitization of teaching is today's standard and it offers great opportunities. People are visual beings, so accordingly using such aids makes it easier for students to follow teaching.'

Table 2 Attitudes of Teachers Depending on Age

Age	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
23–34	1.24	0.44	3.05
35–45	1.02	0.15	
45–56	1.11	0.31	
57–67	1.18	0.41	
Total	1.12	0.33	

of the Croatian language in terms of age, wherein younger teachers express more positive attitudes.

Do you Think the Application of Digital Technology Helps in the Adoption of the Content of the Croatian Language?

Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of teachers on the application of digital technology in teaching Croatian language with regard to age. Taking this into account, there was no need to work the SCHEFFE test. The hypothesis is completely rejected.

In this research we started with the assumption that there are statistically significant differences between teachers of different ages and their attitudes on the use of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language. However, it is a very interesting fact that we have totally rejected this hypothesis because teachers of different ages have equally expressed a positive attitude toward digitization of teaching. This confirms the thesis that, regardless of age, teachers are open to changes and have a positive attitude toward them. This fact is very important for both the contemporary and the future education as teachers are the ones who will be implementing changes with their students. If their attitude is positive, regardless of their age, we can expect technology to be used in teaching in an appropriate and interesting way.

The third goal was to determine whether there are differences in teachers' attitudes with regard to years of work experience. To obtain the desired results we used an ANOVA test to determine statistical differences when there are more than two groups. In our case, there were four independent groups, determined with respect to working experience, at regular intervals. We tested whether there are differences with respect to the five questions posed in the questionnaire. The hypothesis was: There is a statistically significant difference in teachers' attitudes towards the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language with regard to working

Table 3 Attitudes of Teachers with Different Work Experience on the Effectiveness of Teaching Technology

Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
1–9	1.19	0.40	1.15
10–19	1.05	0.22	
20–29	1.12	0.33	
30–39	1.14	0.35	
Total	1.12	0.33	

Table 4 Frequency of Use of Digital Technology in Teaching Croatian Language Content

Answer	<i>f</i>	<i>f%</i>
Once a week	28	22.6
Once a month	24	19.4
Few times a month	47	37.9
Once to twice in semester	25	20.2
Total	124	100.0

experience, wherein teachers with less work experience have more positive attitudes.

Do You Think the Application of Digital Technology Helps in the Adoption of the Content of the Croatian Language?

Table 3 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of teachers about the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language, given the work experience. Taking this into account, there was no need to apply the SCHEFFE test. The hypothesis is completely rejected. Given the above results, we can conclude that teachers are indeed ready to introduce digital technology, not only in the teaching of the Croatian language, but also in teaching in general.

Regarding the fourth objective, we wanted to ascertain how often teachers use digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language and to do so we used a test for the distribution of results. Hypothesis was: Teachers use digital technology in the Croatian language teaching several times a month.

How Often Do You Use Digital Technology to Teach Croatian Language Content?

Since we determined that teachers, regardless of their age and work experience, have a positive attitude towards digital technology in teaching Croatian language, it was necessary to determine how often they use it in their

teaching practice. Processing data we have received feedback that teachers use technology to teach language content several times a month and hence the hypothesis is fully accepted. Given that this research has proven the positive attitudes teachers express towards technology, it is not surprising they use it in teaching even several times a month. However, as technology today is an unavoidable part of students' lives and teaching, the question remains why teachers do not use it more often, for example once a week, as it was offered in the questionnaire. The reasons can be gathered from the respondents' descriptive answers: Unfortunately, my classroom is not equipped with digital technology.; Unfortunately, not every student has their own computer, so I cannot use technology to produce teaching materials.; It is necessary to provide a minimum digital standard in all primary schools so that all students have the same learning conditions.; There are no computers or LCD projectors in the classroom so I use the opportunity while working in the library.; I would like the technical conditions to be better and that all schools are equipped with at least a minimum amount of technology.

What can be derived from above statements is that one of the most important assumptions of using digital technology in Croatian language teaching, and in general, is the technical equipment of the classroom. We could conclude that the percentage of teachers using technology in the language teaching would be higher if they have access to computerized classrooms.

The fifth and final objective of our research was to find out how teachers are self evaluating in terms of their own ability to use digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language. To process data we used the test for the distribution of results. The hypothesis was: Teachers estimate themselves to be quite qualified for the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language.

How Much do You Feel Qualified for the Application of Digital Technology in the Teaching of the Croatian Language?

With the final data processing we found that most teachers estimate that they are quite well trained for the application of digital technology in the teaching of the Croatian language. Therefore, the hypothesis is fully accepted. Research has shown that, regardless of age or work experience, most teachers estimate that they are quite well trained to work with technology, with only a sole teacher expressing a poor qualification, which is very positive.

The results lead us to conclude that teachers are really aware of the importance of digitalization of teaching. Moreover, they have a positive atti-

Table 5 Self-Assessment of the Ability to Apply Digital Technology in the Teaching of the Croatian Language

Answer	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i> %
Not at all	1	8.0
Some	19	15.3
Fairly	83	66.9
Completely	21	16.9
Total	124	100.0

tude towards the changes that are taking place and consider that it is much easier to transfer the knowledge to the students and to motivate them to work with the use of technological aids. This knowledge is very significant because there is still a prevalent thinking that teachers resist digital technology in teaching and consider it useless. From the obtained data we are sure that this is not entirely so. A large number of teachers said that they use technology mostly in the introductory part of the lesson as a motivation, in an introduction to text processing or interpretation, during lecture lessons, and teaching media literacy. The most prominent forms of digital technology in Croatian language classes are computer, projector, PowerPoint presentations, educational games, digital textbooks, quizzes, TV and radio. Almost all teachers agree that technology in the language teaching should be used cautiously and moderately.

Conclusion

Historical changes in communication technology have a significant impact on the education system. The digitization of teaching in the 21st century is a real challenge for teachers and educational authorities alike. Teaching the mother tongue is specific because it implies the development of basic skills such as speech, writing, reading, and communication, so it was particularly interesting to explore whether technology could be applied in teaching, making content more accessible to students. We are aware of the fact that over the last few years there has been a great development of various web-based language learning tools, applications for grammar exercises and dramatization training, quizzes that check knowledge, educational games, and many other aids, so it is not hard to assume that technology could well enrich the teaching of the mother tongue.

The most important thing we wanted to explore and determine by undertaking this research was the attitudes of those who are in charge of implementing change in practice – those of the teacher. With fast technology ad-

vances and students who are more and more familiar with its capabilities, teachers have a very responsible task to properly apply digital materials in teaching. We had to take into account the age of the teachers and their work experience because it is realistic to assume that older teachers and those with more work experience will show a somewhat greater resistance to using digital technology. However, research results reject this thesis – regardless of their age or experience, teachers are equally prepared, not only to accept changes but also to apply them in classroom and teaching. Croatian language is a curriculum that can be enriched with the use of various digital aids and teaching materials. Apart from making the content much clearer to students, digital aids help teachers in writing preparations and preparing teaching materials at home. However, teachers have warned, as indicated in the research, that one must be careful to use technology in stride; otherwise it may overshadow the most important objective, namely the development of the graphomotor and communication skills. The issue of digitization of teaching is very important and requires further exploration. Teachers should be educated and trained as much as possible to be able to follow the pace of continuous technology advancements. Lifelong learning in this context is an important prerequisite for the informational advancement of educators. All teachers have the right to improve their teaching abilities, aiming to provide their students, with the aid of the endless digital possibilities, the greatest possible pleasure in learning the mother tongue.

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Učitelji in izzivi digitalne tehnologije

Zgodovinske spremembe v komunikacijski tehnologiji bistveno vplivajo na izobraževalni sistem. Današnja mladina je popolnoma odvisna od digitalne tehnologije in družbenih mrež. Še do nedavnega so se učenci učili linearno, tako da so racionalno obvladovali gradivo z branjem. Digitalno okolje nudi velike možnosti za razvoj izobraževanja. Razen za zabavo učenci medije uporabljajo tudi v izobraževalne namene, ker lahko najdejo na internetu številne materiale za pouk. Učitelji se morajo zavedati teh generacijskih sprememb, da bi jim prilagodili dinamiko pouka, kajti nove generacije učencev zahtevajo hitrejšo spremembo učnih metod in oblik dela. V prispevku se navajajo rezultati raziskave stališč učiteljev razrednega pouka na Hrvaškem o uporabi digitalnih pripomočkov pri pouku. Velik odstotek izprašancev meni, da digitalna tehnologija pomaga pri motivaciji učencev za delo in pri usvajanju vsebin ter izboljšuje kakovost poučevanja na različnih predmetnih področjih. Učitelji izražajo pozitivno stališče do tehnoloških pripomočkov pri pouku. Avtor navaja primere uporabe IKT pri pouku maternega jezika.

Ključne besede: digitalizacija pouka, materni jezik, multitasking, medijska kultura