

Using Multimedia Resources as Pedagogical Tools for Teaching Gen Z

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Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogical potential of TEDx talks and YouTube videos as instructional materials for teaching life and career skills to Generation Z students. Gen Z learners are digital natives and traditional pedagogical methods like chalk and talk may not engage such learners or address their evolving professional and personal development needs. TEDx talks are personal experience driven narratives delivered by speakers from diverse backgrounds; they offer a rich medium for contextualising essential life skills such as adaptability, leadership, resilience, and career self-awareness through stories. YouTube videos, carefully vetted and chosen, bring the real world into the classroom for learners to reflect upon. The paper analyses how such content may be aligned with learning outcomes related to life and career decisions, including reflective activities and guided discussions. Findings suggest that the audio visual medium can improve learner motivation, encourage reflective learning and serve as effective teaching tools to foster transferable skills essential for Gen Z's holistic development.

Keywords: TEDx talks, YouTube videos, Gen Z, reflective learning, career transition

Introduction

The rapid socio-technological transformation across the globe has profoundly impacted how Generation Z experiences life in general and higher education in particular. Gen Z needs to factor in several transitions during the course of their life and career: challenges of university courses, balancing curricular and extracurricular activities,

being industry ready when graduating from college, and preparing themselves for multiple career shifts. As a result, courses that have relevance for learners must move beyond purely classroom-based study with chalk-and-talk approach to ones that meaningfully connect real life concepts to learners' lived experience.

In this day and age of GenAI, chatbots and the concomitant existential crises confronting Gen Z, it is important that university syllabus and pedagogical practices equip young minds with coping skills in a world that is increasingly moving towards automation and mechanisation. One such course offered to undergraduate students of engineering at NIT Warangal is 'Psychology of Life and Career Transition', a minor course offered as part of a set of courses under the umbrella title *Professional Communication Skills for STEM*. The course is taken by those who wish to obtain a B.Tech. in their respective branch of engineering with a Minor degree in Humanities and Social Sciences. The primary aim of the course is to prepare the learners for complexities of life beyond the classroom and university campus.

Resilience, team building, problem solving, adaptability, confidence and readiness to embrace change are some of the qualities that potential employers look for in the students and the course 'Psychology of Life and Career Transition' aims to equip learners with these skills. The instructor felt that the best way to attract and sustain the attention of learners in the course was to engage them through narratives, stories and events that would relate to situations about life and career choices. The use of open resources such as TEDx talks and YouTube videos proved effective as they support experiential, reflective, and learner-centred pedagogy.

Nurmukhamedov (2017) provides a comprehensive overview of TEDx talks (www.ted.com), where TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design. The media organisation that posts the talks organises two major annual conferences to which people bring "ideas worth spreading", to use TED's slogan. He further writes:

Speakers use their success or fame to pursue humanitarian objectives. Presenters have included Sergey Brin and Larry Page (Google founders), Bill Gates (entrepreneur), Ken Robinson (international advisor on education), Salman Khan (founder of the non-profit educational organization Khan Academy), and Steven Pinker (experimental

psychologist and linguist). Most TED Talks presentations range from 4 to 20 min (very few more than 20 min), and presenters, both native and non-native English speakers, discuss topics in many fields, including science, history, language, business, politics, and music. (pp. 769-70)

Nurmukhamedov adds that more than 2000 presentations are currently available, and for most of the talks free transcripts in English and subtitles in more than 40 languages are provided. TEDx talks have become so popular that they are now employed in university classrooms and intensive English programmes (IEPs). He writes that “Projects like Wiley’s TED Studies (http://www.wiley.com/Wiley_CDA/Section/id-WILEYTED.html) and TED-ED videos (<http://www.ted.com/watch/ted-ed>) provide educational support materials based on TED Talks presentations for university professors and students in social sciences, humanities, science, medicine and other disciplines” (2017, p. 770).

TEDx talks are narrative-driven presentations that feature speakers from varied cultural, professional, and personal backgrounds. Speakers share insights related to various topics and these talks have positive and meaningful impact on the minds of audience. The storytelling mode enables abstract psychological constructs, such as self-esteem, self-management, self-awareness, adaptability, emotional intelligence, etc. to be illustrated through real-world experiences. This narrative approach ensures that learners build their understanding of the world around them by connecting knowledge to personal and social contexts. By watching authentic stories of hope and optimism, learners are better able to recognise psychological patterns, emotional responses, and coping strategies associated with change.

Literature Review

The educative potential of TEDx talks have been studied from varied perspectives like teaching speaking skills (Karunakar, 2019) and soft skills (Eremina, 2022) amongst others. Soft skills include skills as communication skills, negotiation skills, empathy, persuasion skills, team work, conflict resolution skills, creativity, friendliness and leadership skills, while organisational skills include time management, coping with stress, goal setting, strategic planning and critical thinking.

Similarly, the potential of YouTube videos as an educational tool has also been investigated by numerous researchers—Balbay and Kilis (2017)

have discussed the possibility of using YouTube to teach speaking skills; June, Yaacob, and Yeoh (2014) analyse how critical thinking skills may be promoted using YouTube clips; Shaari and Morat (2016) examine how YouTube may be used in online dialogic ESL teaching and learning; and Nurhidayah (2018) has studied the use of YouTube videos in the EFL classroom. Shoufan and Mohamed (2022) report that 647 publications were available until 2022 that discussed how YouTube videos could be gainfully employed for educational purposes.

The biggest advantage of YouTube is the free access it provides for a wide range of contemporary content, including interviews, documentaries, professional advice, reflections on current society and workforce realities. YouTube content is dynamic and topical, allowing users a gateway to almost any topic under the sun, including intensive academic content. Interviews and podcasts with inspiring speakers and motivational talks are a popular genre these days. The biggest challenge of YouTube is checking the reliability and authenticity of content. Misleading, false or fake content may misinform and lead to prejudices and fear mongering. Therefore, YouTube videos must be carefully screened and validated as reliable and trustworthy before sharing them with learners. When thoughtfully selected, YouTube videos can help students critically examine real-life scenarios like personal successes and failures, mental health issues, career indecision, burnout, and personal growth.

From a pedagogical perspective, both TEDx talks and YouTube videos support multimodal learning. Such formats grab attention of Gen Z learners and can create motivation for analysis among digital-native learners accustomed to inputs through online visual media. These tools also encourage reflective learning by prompting students to analyse their own beliefs, values, and aspirations in relation to the content presented. When combined with structured discussions, reflective journals, and take-home assignments, multimedia resources can deepen self-awareness and enable cultivation of transferable life skills such as adaptability, emotional regulation, decision-making and time management. Incorporating TEDx talks and YouTube videos into a course therefore serves both instructional and developmental purposes. By situating learning within authentic narratives and contemporary contexts, teachers can equip students with the insights and resilience needed to navigate life and career transitions effectively.

Method

The course titled 'Psychology of Life and Career Transition' draws from Daniel Goleman's (1998) Emotional Intelligence framework and the CASEL framework (1994) with the following modules: understanding self and others, managing self and others, social awareness and managing relationships, collaboration skills and riding through waves of change. Each of these modules is split into sub units, each sub unit dealing with a specific topic pertaining to the module. (Syllabus can be accessed at https://nitw.ac.in/api/static/files/Humanities_&_Social_Sciences_2023-10-26-17-9-0.pdf)

The number of students taking the course varies every semester, with an average strength of 12-15 students. It is taught in hybrid mode to facilitate learning. The learners attend the course in offline mode two days a week and in online mode once a week. Sometimes to facilitate discussion and promote participation, online mode is used twice a week.

Online sessions provide learners with a platform to voice their views from the comfort of their hostel rooms and sharing the video content with everyone through google meet enables discussions once the video is screened. The learners could re-watch a video after class hours and reflect on the lessons it provided them with. Teaching was extensively activity based for learners. In addition to teaching them life skills, learners were also provided with a platform to hone their LSRW skills. By listening to various language usages and accents in videos, discussing them in class and writing assignments on them, the learners sharpened their LSRW skills.

The study focused on the following research questions:

- What impact does the integration of TEDx talks and YouTube videos into classroom teaching have on learners' motivation to engage with concepts related to life and career transition?
- How effective are multimedia resources as pedagogical tools?

About twelve videos and TEDx talks were shown over the course of the semester of which two representative samples each from TEDx talks and YouTube videos have been used for analysis. The YouTube videos being analysed in the article are animated version of *The Battle of Longewala 1971* and news about the tragic deaths in an NRI family in the USA, *The Haunting Kamal Family Massacre*. The TEDx talks analysed here are

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Danger of a Single Story* and Capt. Raghu Raman's *Why Our Stereotypes Will Kill Us*.

The learners were introduced to the concepts, themes and modules of the course, 'Psychology of Life and Career Transition'. There was a general discussion on topics related to the area of study. This was followed by sharing links of YouTube videos and TEDx talks, which were shared on Google Meet for learners to access as per their convenience.

Questions were put to learners in three phases—pre, during and post activity.

1. *Pre-Activity Questions* - The learners' prior knowledge was assessed and engagement with themes was encouraged.

- What do you already know about the topic of this TEDx talk, and have you come across this talk before?
- What do you expect a TEDx speaker/YouTube video to achieve?

2. *While-Doing Activity Questions*—The questions aimed to encourage learner participation in the event, enable critical analysis, and promote active listening:

- What is the video's /speaker's main claim or central idea?
- What types of evidence does the speaker/video clipping use (data, stories, expert opinion)?
- How would you judge the authenticity of the YouTube video?

3. *Post-Activity Questions*- The purpose of the post activity was to enable reflection by employing critical thinking.

- How relatable is the video content/speaker's views to the modules covered in the course?
- Were there any gaps or unanswered questions in the talk/video?
- What additional evidence would you need to agree or disagree with the speaker?
- How can the ideas or reasoning in this TEDx talk be applied to real-world scenarios?

The above-mentioned structure guided the group discussion, but it was not bound by these questions, and the students brought in different ways of interpreting the videos. Learners were also required to submit an assignment after every class focusing on the following points:

- Identify the theme of the video.
- Demonstrate how the themes of the video align with the module being taught.
- Establish if the video being shown is authentic.
- Relate the video to your life and explain why you identify with the message/theme.

Discussion

The Battle of Longewala 1971

After screening *The Battle of Longewala 1971*, the instructor guided the learners through the activity in class. The grit, determination and superior organisational skills of Major Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri of the Punjab Regiment when outnumbered and outmatched by a full brigade of 2000 plus enemy soldiers, shone through in the video. In the face of certain death for him and his men, Major Chandpuri spread out his men and the limited arms and ammunition in such a way that the enemy was engaged for eight hours from midnight until dawn broke out and the fighter planes of the IAF won the day for India. The learners were taught the importance of 'Using planning and organisational skills'.

The discussion led to several animated exchanges among the learners and between the learners and the instructor. The learners verified the authenticity of the video by researching about the battle and shared details about the Maha Vir Chakra awarded to Major Chandpuri. The students also discussed the movie *Border* (Dutta, 1997) which is based on the Longewala battle. Some of the observations shared by the learners were:

- Life is uncertain and one must have a Plan B in life.
- The video demonstrates the importance of 'Using planning and organisational skills'—a module covered as part of the course.
- It is important to recognise one's strengths and use that to one's advantage.

In the follow up task, students were given assignments to present their views. One student brought in interesting comparisons with *Game of Thrones*, this shows the powerful impact of the visual medium on the learners and their ability to cross-reference cultural texts:

The Battle of Longewala taught me that true power lies not in numbers but in belief. Just like in *Game of Thrones*, where it's said, '*Power resides where men believe it resides*', the handful of Indian soldiers at Longewala held off a massive Pakistani attack because they believed in their mission and in each other. This ties well with our module 'Understanding Self' in the *Psychology of Life and Career Transition* course. It shows how inner conviction and self-awareness can drive action even in the most uncertain times. Whether in battle or in life, it's not just about external strength, it's about how strong we are inside. Longewala reminds me that when we believe in ourselves, we access a power greater than any odds stacked against us. In life, belief isn't just motivation, it's transformation. And to quote again from *Game of Thrones*, "*Even a small man can cast a very large shadow.*"

The Haunting Kamal Family Massacre

To illustrate the sharp contrast between mind-sets and approaches to problem-solving, a real-life tragedy involving a highly successful professional who had given up too early and meekly when things weren't going his way, was screened. The video showed a PIO (person of Indian origin) in the USA, Rakesh Kamal, who took his own life and that of his family members following a string of professional setbacks.

The video drew many comparisons with the valour displayed by soldiers facing imminent death at Longewala, and the tragic succumbing to fate of a man who had not mastered the art of coping with failure and debacles. A debate ensued about why resilience matters in times of crisis and how inner strength matters more than IQ. Some of the points that learners brought up in discussion were:

- To try not to live by expectations of society.
- To try to understand and analyse self to deal with situations in life.
- To think constructively, negative thinking leads to disastrous consequences.
- To be open to seeking help, be it financial or psychological, in times of crises.

Capt. Raghu Raman—Why Our Stereotypes Will Kill Us

TEDx talks were shown while teaching the module titled 'Examining Prejudices and Biases', the screening of talks was followed by discussion

and assignment, and deliberation about its relevance to the course. The talk by Capt. Raghuraman was in the context of increasing cases of fake news, communal clashes and xenophobia across the globe and the catastrophic consequences this has on communal harmony. The talk excited a lot of curiosity and learner participation because of the thought-provoking message. In the animated discussions that followed, the learners expressed their agreement with the content and shared their own experiences of harbouring prejudices based on a person's race, religion, region, accent or ethnicity.

One learner spoke of the North South divide in India and the prejudices that each regional group exercised towards the other, while another student spoke of how people are often classified or put in slots based on their views, faith, race and clan. This was seen as toxic and contributing to perpetuation of stereotypes in an increasingly digitally connected globe where fake news and views spread at lightning pace, threatening harmony and societal peace. The students felt that they should be open to embracing diversity, and to try to understand their classmates and colleagues on the basis of their interactions rather than views and assumptions of others. They felt that this attitude would hold them in good stead later in professional life as well. Following were the main points of the group discussion:

- To avoid categorising people according to predefined and stereotypical categories.
- To avoid narrow mindsets and views.
- To embrace diversity and multiple perspectives.
- To not spread information without fact checks.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—The Danger of a Single Story

In *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie- The Danger of a Single Story*, Adichie talks about events from her childhood, sharing how she had developed stereotypes by relying on single stories and how she changed her views after encountering different perspectives. As a child, she thought that stories were always meant to have white, blue-eyed foreigners as main characters until she discovered African stories from writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye. She recalls feeling pity for Fide because his family was poor but was startled to see that they could also be creative. She poignantly describes the stereotyped assumptions her American

roommate had about Africa and how the roommate was shocked by Adichie's fluency in English. Furthermore, she admits feeling guilty for assuming Mexicans were merely immigrants before visiting Mexico.

One student in the assignment on the TEDx talk by Adichie wrote: and Capt. Raghu Raman:

In her talk, Adichie discusses the dangers of the single story. She provides various examples from her own life and explains how a single story about a place or a person can shape the identity of that place or person in our minds, ultimately creating stereotypes. That is why she refers to stereotypes as incomplete opinions about a place or a person. She adds that these stereotypes can be dangerous, as they hide the other side of the coin, preventing us from making proper judgments. They can misguide us, forming prejudices and robbing people and places of their dignity. There is a saying, 'Half knowledge is dangerous' and that is exactly what stereotypes are. They are based on incomplete ideas and can lead to personal anxiety, communal riots, and even wars in the worst cases, these ideas were also echoed by Capt. Raghu Raman in his talk *Why Our Stereotypes Will Kill Us*.

Adichie in the talk emphasises that it is impossible to truly engage with a person or a place without engaging with different aspects of their stories. She concludes with a powerful quote, "When we reject the single story, we regain a kind of paradise." While it is an injustice to jump to conclusions before knowing the complete story, knowing the whole story is easier said than done. There is always a story behind every story, there are various versions and perspectives to a story or narrative, and digging stories is a way of getting closer to seeing the world without prejudice.

Another student wrote in her assignment:

From Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's talk, I learned that stories have immense power. It is not just to inform, but to shape how we see people, cultures, and even ourselves. When we hear only one version of someone's life or identity, we risk misunderstanding them. That 'single story' becomes a stereotype, not because it's false, but because it's incomplete. It turns people into one-dimensional characters and takes away their dignity. Adichie's message reminded me that true understanding comes from listening to many stories, not just the loudest or the most repeated ones. We need to seek out diverse voices to see the

full picture, that is how we move closer to a more just and connected world. This helped me learn that there are many sides to a person, community, or country about which people think, and none could be entirely true. We judge them based on what we feel is right, but not on what is truly right.

The study carries significant implications for courses that are best taught using a learner centred approach and in ways that Gen Z can connect with. The students participated enthusiastically in the discussion and were able to make connections between the videos used in the class to the module being taught.

Conclusion

It was apparent during the semester that YouTube videos and TEDx talks engaged the attention of the learners and kept them interested in the course. Informal talks with them revealed their satisfaction at being taught through visual media. They felt happy to be able to relate to the messages in the talks as well as see the connection between the course modules and the videos they had been shown. They were also able to relate the videos to incidents from their own lives and thus engage in self-reflection.

Drawing from experience of real-life examples, students learnt that success and failure are part of life. They felt that it is important to learn from various stages of life, and to take judicious decisions when facing crises. Learners were able to introspect on what they had been shown and taught, and that itself attested to the success of the course and the efforts of the teacher in creating a learner centred classroom.

When employed wisely and well, TEDx and YouTube videos have excellent pedagogic value and vast potential to render a course interesting and meaningful for the learners. Multimedia resources exercise a positive impact in teaching Gen Z learners and achieve more than what mere chalk-and-talk methods.

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