

# **DIGITAL NATIVES, DIGITAL IMMIGRANTS, AND TOTAL ENGAGEMENT: BRIDGING THE GAP**

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## **Abstract**

The goal of every organization is to take advantage of the innovations that come with the technology change to ensure maximum performance. Therefore, hiring personnel who are well-informed and equipped with 21st-century skills is vital. However, total engagement remains a dilemma in most organizations. Studies have been done on promoting total engagement. Nevertheless, not much has been covered on bridging the gap between the technology-oriented employees—digital natives, and the pre-technology supervisors—digital immigrants. This paper discusses ways to help bring the digital natives and the digital immigrants to an understanding toward ensuring maximum engagement for effectiveness and efficiency in learning institutions. A systematic review was employed, and the analysis and synthesis of the literature indicated the need for considering the digital natives' characteristics as crucial to total engagement in the 21st-century workforce toward effective teaching and learning because it is their needs that determine the needs of the prevalent digital culture.

## **Keywords**

Total engagement, digital natives, digital immigrants, digital culture

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to Joyner, Rouse, and Glatthorn (2013), there are three ways of organizing a literature review in a study, chronological, opposing camps, or conceptual analysis. The nature of this

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study determined the adoption of two of the suggested ways, conceptual analysis, and opposing camps. The conceptual organization guided the identification of major concepts in related literature: digital natives, digital immigrants, and total engagement. The opposing camps organization helped organize, analyze, and synthesize studies on the two opposing groups of people that are the key features in the phenomenon of this study, the digital natives, and the digital immigrants. The literature review section begins with a general discussion in the form of a conceptual analysis. Then, key concepts and how they relate to each other are introduced and defined. In the rest of the literature review sections, opposing camps analysis was employed in analyzing and synthesizing the literature on challenges of total engagement, bridging the gap, and the characteristics of the digital natives compared to the characteristics of the digital immigrants.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Rationale**

Total engagement is key to maximizing production and retaining customers (Schullery, 2013). It is, therefore, one of the managerial roles to foster and monitor engagement toward meeting the organizational goals (Dessler, 2013; Wiseto, Hubeis, & Sukanadar, 2016). Thus, it is imperative to cogitate the differences in the mind-sets of the digital natives and the digital immigrants (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Schullery, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014), and how the gap can be bridged to ensure successful total engagement without causing any conflicts (Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016). To understand the two different age-era groups, it is important to recognize their respective characteristics (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Kivunja, 2014; Schullery, 2013). Knowing how each group thinks and perceives matters can help address the problem.

An understanding of who the digital natives are, and their characteristics leads to the question: do they think and operate in the

same way with the digital immigrants? The current workforce is gradually getting entirely occupied with digital natives (Schullery, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). The digital immigrants are slowly phasing out with the passage of time (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010).

However, in some organizations the digital immigrants are in the top positions, leading the digital natives who are in lower positions (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). In schools or learning institutions, from elementary level to tertiary education, the teaching and non-teaching staff is a mixture of digital natives and digital immigrants, whereas the students' body in all levels of education is composed of digital natives, and of course some digital immigrants at tertiary level. The challenge is that with this assortment of these groups with different cultures, whose mindset is totally different, total engagement is compromised.

The digital immigrant teacher (with a pre-technology culture) teaching a grade one class of digital natives must make sure that there is total engagement in the class. On the other hand, the digital immigrant head of the school supervising either a digital native teacher or a digital immigrant teacher also needs to ensure total engagement. Sometimes it is the other way round both the school head and the students' body are digital natives; but amongst the teaching and non-teaching staff there are digital immigrants. Thus, the supervisor and the students are operating within the same mindset and the digital immigrant staff is operating within a different mindset.

The two different cultures conflict each other in many ways, making it difficult for people defined with these different cultures to work together, totally engaged toward meeting the organizational goals. There is a huge gap between their mindsets. Hence, the need to bridge the gap between the two groups to ensure success in performance.

A good repertoire of studies has been done on the characteristics of digital natives (Firat, 2013; Kivunja, 2014) and the

definitions of digital natives and digital immigrants (Firat, 2013; Gallardo-Echenique, Marques-Molias, Bullen, & Strijbos, 2015; Kivunja, 2014; Schullery, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014; Thomas & Willis, 2013). Total engagement has also received a great attention in research (Dessler, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014; Wiseto, et al., 2016). However, little, or close to none has been done on the working relationships between digital natives and digital immigrants with a special concern to employees and students' engagement in a school setting. This study addressed the definitions and characteristics of both digital natives and digital immigrants and tried to provide ways of closing the gap of relationships as a means of ensuring digital natives and digital immigrants' total engagement under the supervision of either the digital immigrants or the digital natives, respectively. Thus, ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in learning institutions toward the desired goals.

## Definitions

Digital natives, digital immigrants, and total engagement defined in the organizational context helps explain the current situation at workplaces, which includes learning institutions. The definitions of the three bring to light why it is critical to consider them if organizational goals are to be achieved. The three terms are inevitable and key to organizational success in the 21st century.

**Digital natives.** Digital is defined as computerized technology (Digital, 1978b). Another dictionary definition says digital is the use of a system where information is recorded and electronically transferred (Digital, 1978a). Native is defined as an association to or of indigenous origin or growth (Digital, 1978a). According to the two dictionary definitions, digital native has much to do with originating and growing in or association to electronic systems.

Consequently, digital natives are people who have used digital equipment since they were young (Digital, 1978a). They learn the language of technology naturally; it is native to them. Kivunja

(2014) asserts that digital natives are a product of a new culture that emerged with the deep penetration of young people in digital technology. He further states that they are, therefore, native speakers of the digital language. This definition describes the young teachers and support staff that just attained their professional qualifications and the entire student body that they deal with in schools, from elementary to first degree levels. A question then arises; how then do these digital natives fair in a workplace in the presence of digital immigrants? The other question that arises is: what can be done to ensure coherence between the two groups toward achieving desired results in schools?

**Digital immigrants.** Kivunja (2014) says digital immigrants are people born before the aggressive concentration of the digital technology and are therefore in the process of learning the new language—digital language. Therefore, since the digital era defines a certain new culture (Firat, 2013), the digital immigrants are also defined by their own culture, which they adopted as they were growing up and learning to work (Schullery, 2013). They are fluent in pre-digital skills as much as the digital natives have the skills for digital fluency (Colbert, et al., 2016; Kivunja, 2014). These are teachers and support staff who embrace traditional methods of teaching and operations; and they find it difficult to adopt the new strategies that embrace technology. Yet on the other hand the students that are digital natives learn better through current technology strategies.

The digital immigrants—mostly in the management posts (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014), are supposed to supervise the digital natives and ensure total employee and learner engagement. However, the digital immigrants are in the process of adopting the digital culture and learning the digital language (Gallardo-Echenique, et al., 2015), whilst the digital natives are getting more and more engaged in the aggressive digital technology, which is developing with every day. One wonders how best they can strike a balance

and keep the boat floating—maintaining total engagement, both on the side of the teacher and the side of the learner.

**Total engagement.** Dessler (2013) refers to engagement as being involved psychologically and being fully connected with much commitment toward getting the job done. It has much to do with being motivated to contribute to the achievement of the organizational goals by giving all it takes for the employee as an individual to get their job done. Therefore, total engagement is all about having a bound sense to the organization (Wiseto, et al., 2016). It entails being loyal to the organization requirements and having the zeal to do the best and engage the most toward meeting the organizational goals. The organizational goal for learning institutions is to achieve the desired results for the students. Hence, the definition above means the desired results can only be attained through total engagement of the crucial stakeholders: school administration, the teacher, the support staff, and the student.

**Importance of engagement.** From a business perspective, engaged employees boost customer satisfaction. Every business's success is determined by the satisfaction of customers, which guarantees return business (Schullery, 2013). If employees are totally engaged, they unanimously push toward organizational success. With a bound sense to the organization, they all target meeting the organizational goals, which entail quality services, leading to customer satisfaction, which ensures increased sales and higher profits (Schullery, 2013). As a result, the company realizes higher shareholder returns. Thus, engaged employees are more goal-oriented than salary/benefit-oriented; they are loyal to the organization and do all it takes to succeed (Schullery, 2013). They have neither time nor duty limits, doing all to position everything in place.

In a school setting, the client is the student. The satisfaction of the students determines the success of the school. When the students are satisfied and happy with the services, they will comply with the codes of conduct that are set for the smooth running of the school toward achieving desired results by totally engaging

themselves in all school operations as presented to them. However, the provision of quality and efficient services takes total engagement of the school administration, the teachers, and the support staff. That can only be achieved when these three groups (formed of both digital natives and digital immigrants) are working in harmony to meet the needs of the digital native students.

***Fostering engagement.*** Since the success of the organization highly depends on all parties' total engagement, it is therefore, the duty of every manager or head of department to make sure all the personnel and students in their department are fully engaged. Dessler (2013) suggests that it is crucial to make sure all the employees understand how their department contributes to the company's success. When they realize the importance of their department, they will also realize the importance of their individual efforts, and hence, develop a sense of achievement by being part of the success of the company (Schullery, 2013).

Wiseto, et al. (2016) emphasize that the employees need to have self-initiative. They need to find ways of engaging their talents for the success of the organization. Thus, the management has a duty to induce such behavior from the employees as a way of ensuring total engagement. The traditional team players, the digital immigrants come with some skills that are still useful in the technology era. Their experience is also vital in the successful operations in a school setting. The digital natives also come with their technology skills that are also vital for survival in the technology era, which is determined by a technology culture. It is a management duty to identify these skills from each team player (teachers, support staff, students) in their departments to make sure that each team player whether digital immigrant or digital native is placed at the right place and provided with the needed resources for total engagement. Ensuring balance is key to success and harmonious performance. There is, therefore, a need for the provision of a harmonious environment for digital natives and digital immigrants.

## **Total engagement challenges in the 21st century**

According to research, only about 21% of the global workforce is engaged (Dessler, 2013). Dessler (2013) further asserts that if the company is to have 83% chance performing above its median, there must be high levels of engagement; lowest levels of engagement result to 17% chance of performing above the company median. Hence, high level of engagement is a desire for every company, yet the research statistics indicate a very low level of engagement globally.

It is noteworthy that the current global workforce is a combination of digital natives and digital immigrants (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Schullery, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). In some cases—that emphasize experience, the digital immigrants are in the leadership positions leading the digital natives (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014), yet in other cases—that emphasize qualification and skill, it is vice versa; digital natives are leading the digital immigrants. In school settings it is a common norm that school presidents, associate presidents and even a significant percentage of the teaching and non-teaching staff are digital immigrants versus a good percentage of teaching and non-teaching staff and the entire student body that are digital natives. It is, therefore, imperative to assert that the difference in cultures between the two differently oriented subsets of the work-force swimming in the same pool must be one of the major reasons behind the lack of employee engagement at workplace (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Schullery, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014).

That same difference determined by the pre-technology era culture and the digital culture affects the teacher–student relationship in a school setting. It may also affect the teaching effectiveness of a digital immigrant teacher. The mindset of the digital immigrant teacher is totally different from the mindset of the digital immigrant student. Hence, the teacher’s engagement may be affected by frustration and on the other hand the students may



also disengage themselves from their schoolwork if they are not happy with the teacher that does not meet their needs.

Lack of total engagement compromises production quantity. When teachers and non-teaching staff are not totally engaged, it becomes difficult to achieve the goals of a learning institution. That means the students are not fully attended to, and their needs are not met, which leads to a lack of engagement on the part of the students; hence, they cannot perform well in school. When on the other hand, school students are not totally usually engaged in indiscipline results. Young people always find something to occupy themselves. Their culture, the digital culture, drives them to keep busy. Hence, if they are not totally engaged in their schoolwork, they find other ways of keeping themselves busy. Unfortunately, in most cases, they get into what always leads them to disciplinary cases; as a result, their school performance is affected, or they even drop out of school. The difference between the digital immigrants' culture and the digital natives' culture is inevitable, yet it affects performance in organizations, leading to failure or challenges in achieving organizational goals. Consequently, to defeat the challenges, there is a need to find ways of bridging the gap between the two different age-era groups to reach a consensus and achieve high engagement.

## **Bridging the gap**

The sudden shift to the online era brings about a lot of changes that organizations need to keep in pace with, to succeed. However, most organizations whilst doing well in the updating of electronic equipment, still lag in the management of human capital. The change in technology brings about irrelevance of some orthodox skills (Kivunja, 2014), yet organizations still hold on to the bearers of such skills as their stronghold, when they have become irrelevant. Thus, the digital immigrants without upgrading and adopting the digital culture become irrelevant, though considered

experienced and loyal. The digital natives are relevant though their loyalty and experience is still questionable in most cases.

Fullan (2014) introduces the concept of right drivers and wrong drivers. According to Fullan (2014), these drivers are policies and strategies that are employed to initiate successful reform in education systems. This reformation is what is needed as we transit toward bridging the gap between the digital immigrants and the digital natives to ensure total engagement that enforces the achievement of organizational goals. Fullan (2014) states that education systems that are doing well in this transformation are those that adopt the right drivers; and those that are still struggling are those that are rigid to adopt the right drivers, hence, they are stuck with the wrong drivers. He further asserts that the right drivers emphasize “intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, teamwork, and ‘allness’” (p. 3) as crucial elements of educational systems reformation. Thus, the right drivers work directly toward changing the culture (Fullan, 2014).

In presenting the drivers, Fullan (2014) begins with the aspect of accountability versus capacity building. Accountability is the wrong driver, and capacity building is the right driver. Accountability focuses on setting standards that need to be met; and designing instruments that will be used for assessment to ensure that everyone is meeting the standards. Punishment and rewards are then enforced accordingly. However, these standards and forms of assessment are demotivators to teachers, non-teaching staff, and students. Besides, their preparation and implementation take a lot of time, distract work time; and are also significantly costly financially. Capacity building entails equipping the personnel with the right skills that they need to perform effectively (Fullan, 2014). It embraces providing opportunities for further studies and skills development that help the individuals to stay abreast in the dynamic digital era. Twenty-first century teachers need to be equipped with the 21st century teaching strategies and skills (Fullan, 2014; Trilling & Fadel, 2009) that help them to be relevant to

the 21st century learners, who are digital natives. The support staff like the information technology (IT) staff, the library staff, and all other departments also need the 21st century skills to work well with the 21st century students and give them the best service. The digital language must be learnt by everyone living in the digital era, especially those serving at institutions that are saturated with digital natives. Hence, there is a need for workshops, seminars, and any other form of learning that can be used to furnish the personnel with the desired skills. Well-equipped personnel is motivated to work, love, and enjoy their work. Hence, efficiency and effectiveness can be realized. Intrinsic motivation is guaranteed when the workers know what they are doing, and they realize the fruits of their labor; thus, accountability results.

On the other hand, when students are provided with enough facilities for learning, they tend to enjoy their schoolwork. Thus, when the teachers and non-teaching staff are well equipped, they will provide the best service to the students and good learning outcomes will be achieved. Personnel that is abreast with the 21st century skills are creative and innovative (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Such teachers, working together with non-teaching staff will provide an ideal environment for the digital natives; and when they are happy, they will be ready to learn. When students are enjoying learning they become motivated; and consequently, accountability is assured. Once capacity building is opted for instead of accountability, then accountability is not guaranteed. Pursuing accountability and putting in place measures that ensure accountability leads to demotivation, no accountability, and failure as the result. However, pursuing capacity building and ensuring everything is put in place toward the training of personnel and provision of the right equipment leads to motivation, accountability, and success. Thus, when the right drivers are employed what is sought for but never achieved when choosing to use the wrong drivers is ensured (Fullan, 2014).

What leads to failure in many organizations, especially learning institutions is the lack of foresight to develop and nurture capacity building. This observation by Fullan (2014) is even more relevant now when technology is more complex.

Since technology is here to stay and keeps advancing every day, there is a need to come to terms with the fact that the digital immigrants are the ones to adjust and adopt the new digital culture and learn to work with, under, and through the digital natives, who are the natives of the digital era and the culture (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). Instead of investing in accountability measures that frustrate and demotivate the digital natives, at the same time being a contrast and irrelevant to the digital era, investment must be focused in equipping the digital immigrants with skills that will help them cope with the digital culture. Capacity building fosters intrinsic motivation. When people are motivated, they get engaged willingly, without any measures set to ensure that everyone is at the right place at the right time; hence, motivation is an important step toward accountability, which in turn leads to the accomplishment of organizational goals, good performance and achievement by students.

On the other hand, if the wrong driver (accountability) is used, people (teachers, non-teaching staff, and students) become demotivated, thus, inefficiency and ineffectiveness are manifested. In fear of punishment, they opt for dishonest ways, manufacturing results that are not true, when work and learning did not take place in the way it was supposed to. When that happens the goal of education that has much to do with character building is not achieved. The aspect of character building as an important facet of education is compromised. Students that are produced from such systems may not perform well at their workplaces, they may have learnt or adopted wrong values from their leaders while they were at school. Hence, the effects are seen in the collapse of economies. A poor education system has a negative economic impact.

Both digital immigrants and digital natives need to work together and be committed in total engagement; but only that can be possible if the gap between the two groups is grouped. Since the digital culture and the digital language are dominating the digital era (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014); and the digital natives are quickly flooding the workplaces whilst at the same time the digital immigrants are phasing out, the best ways toward bridging the gap are those that accommodate the digital natives. The first step toward accommodating them is learning about them, getting to understand them.

Kivunja (2014) states that the only way of understanding something new and be able to work with it is to understand its characteristics first. Hence, the only way to understand the digital natives and be able to work with them and ensure they are totally engaged, is to understand how they think, how they want things done, and their general nature (Schullery, 2013; Wiseto, et al., 2016). When their characteristics are understood, effort must be put to meet their needs (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). When their needs are met, they will become loyal to their employers and develop a bound sense to their organizations—total engagement (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Schullery, 2013).

## **Characteristics of the digital natives**

Digital natives are used to a lot of social media, they are so connected and, hence, they are natural collaborators (Colbert, et al., 2016; Gallardo-Echenique, et al., 2015; Schullery, 2013; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). Even at work they want to share their ideas within and without the organization. Whereas digital immigrants believe in competition (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010), they also believe that company privacy is key to competitive advantage. Digital immigrants therefore need to realize that collaboration is a digital value, derived from the digital culture that they need to adopt if they are to stand the digital age market competition by keeping the digital natives engaged.

According to Fullan (2014)'s right and wrong drivers, groups achieve better than individuals. He states this set of drivers as group quality versus individual quality. Group quality is the right driver, and individual quality is the wrong driver. Fullan (2014) suggests that if success is to be achieved in 21st-century schools, teachers must work in groups and achieve as a group. Team teaching or co-teaching needs to be embraced by both teachers and students. Students also need to engage in study groups to attain higher achievements. Joyce and Showers (2002), in their training model, assert that study groups are key to success in training teachers for any innovation. Whenever there is a new skill or strategy that teachers need to master, according to Joyce and Showers (2002), mastery is at its best only when teachers have helped each other by working together toward achieving the skill or strategy.

Consequently, Fullan (2014) and Joyce and Showers (2002) agree that collaboration is one of the key characteristics in the 21st century digital culture. Since Colbert et al. (2016), Gallardo-Echenique et al. (2015), Schullery (2013), and Strycharczyk and Elvin (2014) have also identified collaboration as one of the digital natives' characteristics, it goes without saying that what has been suggested by Fullan (2014) and Joyce and Showers (2002) needs to be put into consideration for best achievements in schools. Teachers must share their skills and strategies within their schools and other schools and districts instead of competing. By so doing, they will appreciate and adopt the culture of collaboration. When they have adopted that culture, they will, in turn, enforce it in their teaching practice through strategies like cooperative learning; thus, the needs of the digital natives will be met. Teachers must achieve as a team, and students also must achieve as a group.

Collaboration comes with fun. Digital natives love fun, compared to digital immigrants who live for work and no leisure (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010). If workplaces are to be conducive for the digital natives, the digital immigrants must understand that fun is part of life to the digital natives, hence, fun and work cannot be

separated (Schullery, 2013). Where there is no fun less engagement result. There is a need for teachers to bring fun into the classroom. When capacity building is ensured, teachers will understand that collaboration is key in the digital era, and when collaboration is embraced and enforced teaching strategies will bring a lot of fun into the classroom. Policy makers need to adjust the curriculum so that it is flexible enough to accommodate fun, then the digital natives will be fully engaged in their learning.

Critical thinking forms the mind-set of the digital natives. They do not accept and adopt just as given (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014), they can analyze and criticize openly. When their opinions are respected or given a chance to be tested, they enjoy the sense of achievement and feel accepted (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Wiseto, et al., 2016). They will then want to achieve more for the good of the organization, hence, they will be engaged. Gone are the days when the teacher was referred to as all knowing. Now knowledge is everywhere, hence, teachers need to embrace teaching strategies that promote independent learning. The teacher is now viewed as a fellow learner in the classroom (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Learners must be allowed room to share what they discovered on their own. When they are denied that opportunity, learning becomes boring to them, and they disengage themselves. Research and presentations must be promoted.

Critical thinking comes with innovation. Digital natives are exposed to a lot of information (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). Thus, they quickly learn new ways of doing things or even inventing new things (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). Being allowed that opportunity to exercise their maximum innovative potential makes them enjoy work and find it fun. When they think work is fun they stay at work. They become motivated and they feel wanted, hence, they become loyal to the organization and give all their time and skill to working toward the organizational goals (Wiseto, et al., 2016). Participation is also part of their nature. When their innovation is accepted and put into use, they feel as effective

participators in the success of the organization. In learning institutions policy makers and implementers must enforce a curriculum that allows for innovation. Students must be engaged in projects that bring solutions to the problems in the community or society. When they see that their projects are appreciated and accepted, they will be motivated to learn, and hence, become engaged. Teachers and learning institutions must provide guidance in such projects (Trilling and Fadel, 2009).

As much as they are always ready to learn, they only want to learn what they must learn. They have no time for learning stuff they feel they do not need there and there. Digital immigrants also need to accept that digital natives are well-informed, they learn a lot from the net (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014). Their attention span is limited. They also learn fast. Hence, they do not want to be bored with what they already know or with what they can learn on their own from the net.

When their characteristics are identified, they need to be embraced. When they are embraced by the 21st century systems, digital natives will be totally engaged. On the other hand, the systems need to make sure that the right drivers are adopted instead of the wrong drivers. When that is done, total engagement by both the digital natives and the digital immigrants will be ensured; and thus, the gap between the two groups will be bridged and total engagement by teachers (either digital natives or digital immigrants) and students that are digital natives will be certain.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The literature review integrative methodology was adopted. In integrative approach to literature review different perspectives related to the phenomenon are combined toward established a theoretical model (Snyder, 2019). Scholarly books and journal articles related to the phenomenon in question were surveyed, analyzed, and synthesized. The analysis and synthesis of related literature resulted in the findings presented in this article as a



contribution to the board of knowledge in addressing the 21st Century challenges. General literature review can be defined as a “systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research” (Snyder, 2019:333). According to Snyder (2019). Literature review is a building block for all informed research studies because all research studies are built on or related to knowledge that is already existing. Employing literature review as a methodology allows for a more effective exhaustion of the flooded literature in any given field (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, literature review methodology in research provides a firm foundation in the process of advancing knowledge in any field. It also facilitates the development of a theory that can be adopted and implemented for better practices.

In this study a wide pool of recent literature was reviewed. Because of the nature of the phenomenon in question, only recent studies were reviewed to promote relevance in findings. Literature review methodology allows for a vigorous review of literature, thus, the analysis and synthesis of literature in this study provided findings that make up a theory that can be adopted by 21st century learning institutions as a way of closing the gap between the digital natives and the digital immigrants.

## **Ethical considerations**

The work that contributed to the results of this study was credited to the original authors through in-text citations and a provision of a reference list. This paper represents the original work of the author, it is not a copy of any work published before, neither does the author consider publishing it through any other platform.

## **RESULTS**

Serrat (2017) defines culture as the “totality of a society’ distinctive ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge” (p. 31). As noted in earlier sections, the digital natives are a product of a new culture, the digital culture. Culture is a manifestation of how humans make

sense of their environment (Serrat, 2017). Therefore, since the digital culture is the prevailing culture in the 21st century organizations, it means that the digital natives are the ones determining the prevailing environment in organizations. Consequently, the characteristics of the digital natives suggest the values of the digital culture and digital language. The digital immigrants must, therefore, adopt these values if they are to work well with the digital natives (Hannay & Fretwell, 2010; Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014; Wiseto, et al., 2016); since the digital natives are the product of the digital culture, which is here to stay. By so doing the workplace, including learning institutions will be characterized with high level of employee engagement; and the students, who are digital natives will be totally engaged in their schoolwork and positive outcomes will be realized.

Serrat (2017) asserts that culture has a significant contribution in the development of organizations where different groups are working together in harmony. This assertion agrees with Schullery's (2013) assertion that total engagement is key to maximizing production. When the gap between the digital natives and the digital immigrants is bridged, the two groups will work together in harmony; and total engagement will be assured; and that promotes development toward attaining desired outcomes.

As highlighted in the literature review, both groups need each other for improved practices. The cultural theory that pays attention to common needs in a society affirms the importance of focusing on the organization as a whole; but at the same time not ignoring the parts that make up the whole (Serrat, 2017). Thus, focusing on the characteristics of both groups and their relationship with the environment that is determined by the digital culture may assist in coming up with strategies that may lead to the implementation of better practices toward fostering total engagement. By so doing, proper contextualization will be ensured, and positive results will be yielded.

The cultural theory also affirms that the survival of organizations depends on the fact that they are comprised of social beings with unique ideas that, when pooled together, provide an informed whole (Serrat, 2017). The digital natives and digital immigrants with vast differences in their mindsets can successfully work together, but only when best practices that bridge the gap between them are implemented. Therefore, open-minded leadership will recognize the characteristics of the two groups, understands them, and put in place best practices to bridge the gap between them; then, total engagement will be ensured.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is imperative to note that the key to total engagement in the 21st century systems is meeting the needs of the digital natives (Strycharczyk & Elvin, 2014), because they determine the needs of the digital culture. Administrators must promote a well-balanced working environment conducive for the satisfaction of the digital natives and when they are satisfied, they will become self-motivated and engagement will be maximized; characterized with employee retention, good attendance, psychological involvement, and commitment to work (Dessler, 2013; Schullery, 2013). They will also develop a spirit of accountability and loyalty to their organizations (Wiseto, et al., 2016).

When they are dissatisfied, there will be less engagement characterized with poor attendance to duties, high and voluntary turnover, psychological withdrawal, and no commitment to work—eventually they leave in search for satisfaction (Schullery, 2013), in case of learners in learning institutions they may even drop out of school. Digital immigrants must make sure they treat the adoption to the digital culture as a matter of urgency. Adoption of digital culture and digital language entails upgrading themselves with the digital skills.

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