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UNDERSTANDING GENERATION Z THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVES OF EXPERIENCED EDUCATORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges and successful teaching strategies employed by veteran educators when engaging with Generation Z students. Also, this adopts a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of senior teachers in understanding and teaching Generation Z students. The participants consisted of seven senior or tenured teachers who have been teaching for at least five years or more. The findings of this study offer significant insights into the evolving landscape of education as influenced by the unique characteristics and learning preferences of Generation Z students. As educators strive to meet the demands of this digitally native generation, the implications extend beyond individual teaching practices to encompass institutional policies, school leadership, and broader educational frameworks. This study highlights the critical need for flexibility, innovation, and a holistic approach in adapting teaching methods to foster meaningful engagement and effective learning.

KEYWORDS-*Understanding Generation Z, Perspectives of Experienced Educators, Phenomenological Approach*

INTRODUCTION

Born into a world characterized by rapid technological advancements, social media dominance, and shifting cultural norms, Generation Z poses unprecedented challenges and opportunities in the classroom. By focusing on the lived experiences of tenured teachers, this research aims to uncover their perceptions, strategies, and struggles in adapting their pedagogical practices to meet the needs of this digital-native generation. This study is inherently complex and problematic due to several factors. First, the generational gap between teachers and students may lead to biases or incomplete understandings of Generation Z's values, behaviors, and learning preferences. Additionally, the diversity within Generation Z itself makes it difficult to generalize findings, as socioeconomic, cultural, and technological disparities significantly shape their experiences. Moreover, exploring subjective experiences through a phenomenological approach requires rigorous analysis to ensure authenticity while minimizing researcher interpretation biases. These challenges underscore the need for a careful and nuanced exploration of the topic.

The article from the Journal of Asian Education Studies (2022), presents critical insights into how experienced teachers navigate the complexities of teaching Generation Z students in Asian educational contexts. Recognizing Generation Z's tech-savviness, educators are incorporating digital tools such as learning management systems, gamified learning platforms, and multimedia resources. However, the study emphasizes the importance of strategic and purposeful integration to enhance learning outcomes without compromising foundational academic skills.

Meanwhile, in the Asia Pacific Journal of Education (2021), it provided valuable insights into how experienced educators view and adapt to the learning behaviors of Generation Z in Singapore's educational landscape. Veteran teachers observed that Generation Z students tend to be more independent and digitally inclined, often preferring self-paced, technology-enhanced learning. While these students are highly adept at using digital tools, they often struggle with focus and attention during traditional classroom activities. Teachers noted a shift in students' expectations for instant feedback and engagement.
In Japan's education system, which has historically emphasized discipline, rote learning, and teacher authority, there is a noticeable cultural tension between these traditional values and the more informal, interactive learning styles preferred by Gen Z. Teachers have expressed concerns about maintaining classroom discipline and focus when incorporating more student-centered, technology-driven methods, as this contrasts with the strict, formal classroom dynamics typically found in Japanese schools, (Yamamoto and Sato, 2023).

In the Philippine Journal of Education (2022), the study highlighted significant challenges in integrating technology into Philippine public schools, particularly in resource-limited settings. Teachers noted issues such as inadequate access to digital tools, inconsistent internet connectivity, and limited teacher training on the effective use of educational technology. These barriers hinder the full potential of technology to enhance learning, making it difficult to fully meet Generation Z's digital expectations. Teachers have adjusted their approaches to accommodate the unique needs of Generation Z. These adaptations include integrating technology into lessons, utilizing online resources and educational apps, and incorporating collaborative learning activities that encourage student participation. Teachers also emphasized the importance of fostering critical thinking and creativity through project-

based assignments, discussions, and interactive activities that align with Gen Z's preference for dynamic learning experiences.

Senior teachers reported difficulties in establishing effective communication with Generation Z students, primarily due to differences in communication styles. While teachers preferred face-to-face, formal interactions, Gen Z students favored informal, digital forms of communication, such as text messages and social media platforms. This generational divide often led to misunderstandings and a perceived lack of respect for authority, as Gen Z students are more accustomed to informal, egalitarian communication, Reyes and Mendoza (2023) in The Normal Lights Journal.

Garcia and Luna (2022) in Philippine Studies, stated that one of the major challenges identified in the study is the lack of resources in many Philippine classrooms. Teachers in resource-limited settings face difficulties in providing adequate technology, internet access, and digital tools necessary to fully engage Gen Z learners. This disparity in resources creates a gap between the idealized use of technology in education and the realities faced by many public schools, limiting the effectiveness of technology integration in the classroom.

Teachers in Davao City have had to adapt both culturally and technologically to meet the needs of Generation Z. Culturally, educators have had to balance the traditional, respect-driven teacher-student relationship with the more informal, egalitarian communication style preferred by Gen Z students. Technologically, educators have embraced a variety of digital tools and resources, though their use remains constrained by local technological limitations. Teachers have had to be resourceful, often creating low-tech solutions to supplement learning in classrooms with limited access to the internet or devices, (Mindanao Journal of Education, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers documented various challenges in classroom interactions, particularly in adapting traditional teaching methods to suit the learning preferences of Gen Z students. These students, who are deeply engaged with technology and accustomed to instant access to information, presented difficulties in maintaining focus during more traditional, lecture-based lessons. Teachers noted the need to continuously adapt their instructional approaches to keep students engaged and facilitate learning in a way that aligns with their technological orientation, (Kim and Park, 2022).

Another significant finding was the teachers' emphasis on maintaining cultural values and traditions while adapting to the digital and more globalized learning environment of Gen Z. Senior teachers were particularly focused on finding ways to blend modern teaching methods with the preservation of Malaysian cultural heritage, ensuring that students remained connected to their cultural roots even as they engaged with the digital world. This effort to preserve cultural identity within the classroom was seen as a key part of the teachers' broader educational mission, (Abdullah and Rahman, 2021).

The study of Tan and Lee (2023) also documented the shifting dynamics in the classroom as a result of technology and the generational differences between teachers and their students. Teachers noted that Gen Z students are more accustomed to collaborative, self-directed learning, often seeking instant access to information. This change in student behavior prompted teachers to adapt their classroom management strategies and instructional methods. Teachers reported needing to foster more student-centered, flexible environments that allow for greater interaction, creativity, and digital engagement.

Also, a significant theme in the study was the resource limitations faced by teachers in many Philippine classrooms. Despite the widespread push for digital learning, many teachers struggled with inadequate access to technology, such as computers, reliable internet, and educational software. These limitations often hindered their ability to effectively integrate digital tools into their teaching, leading teachers to find creative, resourceful ways to maximize the use of available resources, (Sandigal & Romorosa, 2022).

According to Hasib et al. (2021), one of the central findings of the study was the emotional toll experienced by veteran teachers as they attempted to bridge the generational gap. Many teachers expressed feelings of frustration, confusion, and inadequacy when faced with students who had different expectations of education, communication, and authority. The emotional challenges were compounded by the pressures of adapting to new technologies and educational reforms, with many teachers feeling that their extensive experience in traditional teaching methods was not always aligned with the needs of Gen Z learners.

Similarly, a study also explored the professional growth of seasoned teachers as they navigated the digital transformation. Many teachers shared how the transition to digital teaching pushed them to enhance their digital literacy and pedagogical knowledge. While some teachers initially felt overwhelmed, they ultimately found the process to be a rewarding opportunity for personal and professional development. Teachers expressed a sense of accomplishment in acquiring new skills and adapting to new educational tools, and many viewed these changes as an essential part of their ongoing professional journey, (Dango et al. 2023).

Locally, in Davao City, the study of Minor et al. (2022) underscores the importance of adapting teaching practices to local contexts, integrating cultural elements into the curriculum, and building strong community support systems to effectively teach Generation Z students. It highlights how veteran teachers in Davao City use their deep

understanding of the local culture and community resources to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for their students.

Research Questions

The study aims to explore how teachers perceive and adapt to the evolving behaviors, learning preferences, and technological needs of this generation. Central to this inquiry is the question of how teachers navigate local challenges, such as socio-economic disparities and limited access to technology, while still striving to provide an engaging and effective learning experience for their students. Specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of tenured teachers in engaging with and adapting to the learning needs and characteristics of Generation Z students?
2. What are the coping strategies of tenured teachers in engaging with and adapting to the learning needs and characteristics of Generation Z students?
3. What are the educational insights learned by the tenured teachers in engaging with and adapting to the learning needs and characteristics of Generation Z students?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of senior teachers in understanding and teaching Generation Z students. Phenomenology is particularly suited for this research as it focuses on understanding individuals' subjective experiences and how they make sense of those experiences. By examining how veteran educators perceive and navigate the challenges of teaching digital natives, the research aims to uncover the essence of their lived realities in the context of changing generational dynamics.

Research Participants

The participants in this study was the seven senior or tenured teachers who have been teaching for at least five years or more. This experience ensures that the participants have a sufficient understanding of generational changes in education and can provide valuable insights into the shifts in student behavior, learning preferences, and the strategies they have adopted to teach Generation Z students. The participants will be selected from a range of schools, including both public and private institutions, to capture diverse experiences and perspectives.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument for this phenomenological study will be semi-structured interviews. This qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of senior teachers as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of teaching Generation Z students. The semi-structured format will enable participants to share their unique perspectives while also ensuring consistency across interviews. The interview guide will include open-ended questions grouped into key themes such as teaching strategies, classroom dynamics, communication styles, and professional development. For example, teachers will be asked about how they have adapted their teaching methods for Gen Z learners, their use of technology in the classroom, and how they engage students with diverse learning styles.

Interviews will be conducted in a quiet, private space to ensure participants feel comfortable and can speak freely. The duration of each interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and all interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' consent for transcription. To enhance the reliability of the data, pilot testing will be conducted with a small group of participants, and adjustments will be made based on feedback to refine the interview guide. Credibility will be ensured through member checking, where participants will review the interview transcripts for accuracy, and dependability will be achieved by maintaining detailed notes on the research process.

Data Analysis

For this phenomenological study, data analysis will be guided by Creswell's (2013) approach to thematic analysis, which is well-suited for examining qualitative data from in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis helps to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data, offering insight into the shared experiences of participants while staying grounded in the lived experiences of individuals. This method is ideal for exploring the experiences of senior teachers in understanding and adapting to Generation Z learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implication

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the evolving landscape of education as influenced by the unique characteristics and learning preferences of Generation Z students. As educators strive to meet the demands of this digitally native generation, the implications extend beyond individual teaching practices to encompass institutional policies, school leadership, and broader educational frameworks. This study highlights the critical need for flexibility, innovation, and a holistic approach in adapting teaching methods to foster meaningful engagement and effective learning.

The implications derived from the main themes underscore the importance of embracing technology, cultivating interactive and student-centered pedagogies, and fostering supportive environments that address both the academic and socio-emotional needs of learners. These insights call for collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders

to transform traditional classrooms into dynamic learning spaces that not only respond to the challenges posed by Generation Z but also harness their strengths.

In the following sections, the implications for educational policy, school leadership, and classroom practice are discussed in detail, providing a roadmap for how these findings can inform future initiatives and enhance the overall quality of education.

Main Theme 1: Adapting Teaching Practices to the Learning Needs and Characteristics of Generation Z Students

The findings highlight that teaching Generation Z demands significant adaptation of traditional pedagogical methods. The first subtheme,implies that educators must integrate digital tools and interactive learning techniques to meet the expectations of digitally native students. The use of multimedia, gamification, and collaborative activities not only captures the attention of Gen Z learners but also facilitates deeper understanding by making lessons more relatable and dynamic. This suggests an urgent need for schools and educational systems to invest in infrastructure, resources, and training to equip teachers with the skills and tools necessary for technology-enhanced teaching.

The second subtheme,underlines the importance of recognizing Gen Z's distinct traits, such as their preference for instant feedback, active participation, and meaningful learning experiences. Teachers must cultivate an empathetic and responsive classroom environment that supports these preferences, thereby enhancing motivation and engagement. This requires a shift from rigid, lecture-based instruction to more personalized and flexible teaching that accommodates diverse learning styles and promotes student autonomy.

The third subtheme,reflects the dual nature of teaching this generation. While educators face challenges like managing short attention spans and the demand for instant gratification, the rewards lie in witnessing active, motivated learners who thrive when teachers exhibit adaptability and creativity. This necessitates continuous professional development focused on innovative pedagogical approaches and emotional resilience, ensuring that teachers remain effective and fulfilled in their roles.

Collectively, these findings imply that teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development must prioritize equipping educators with technological literacy, adaptive teaching strategies, and classroom management techniques tailored to Gen Z learners. Educational policies should support flexible curricula and foster environments that encourage experimentation and innovation in teaching.

Main Theme 2: Connecting Learning to Real-World Relevance

This theme emphasizes the importance of grounding education in practical, real-life contexts to increase its relevance and impact for Generation Z students. The first subtheme, suggests that teachers themselves must be lifelong learners, embracing continuous improvement and openness to new methods. The professional growth of educators directly influences their ability to connect curriculum content with real-world applications, thereby making learning meaningful and motivational for students.

The second subtheme, highlights the critical role of teachers' emotional intelligence and mental wellness in creating supportive learning environments. A calm and positive attitude fosters trust and reduces anxiety among students, which is particularly important for Gen Z learners who often face high levels of stress and uncertainty. Teachers who model resilience and positivity can inspire students to adopt similar mindsets, promoting a healthier and more productive learning atmosphere.

The third subtheme,points to the necessity of strong networks among teachers, students, parents, and the broader school community. Effective communication and collaborative support structures enable the sharing of ideas, resources, and emotional support, which are crucial for adapting to the fast-paced changes in education. Such networks empower teachers to better meet students' needs and contribute to a more cohesive and responsive educational ecosystem.

These insights underscore the need for school leadership to foster a culture of professional collaboration, wellness programs, and open communication channels. Policies should encourage investment in teacher training focused on emotional intelligence and real-world pedagogy, while schools should prioritize community-building initiatives that link classroom learning with everyday life.

Main Theme 3: Modernizing Teaching for Generation Z Learners

The third theme centers on transforming teaching approaches to align with the unique attributes and expectations of Gen Z. The first subtheme, implies that rigid, one-size-fits-all instructional methods are no longer viable. Teachers must diversify their approaches, blending experiential, collaborative, and technology-enhanced strategies to address varied learning preferences. This flexibility enables more inclusive and equitable education, where every student's learning needs are acknowledged and accommodated.

The second subtheme,reinforces technology's central role in modern education. Beyond mere access, effective integration requires thoughtful selection of digital tools that enhance interaction, creativity, and personalized feedback. This calls for ongoing teacher training and institutional support to overcome challenges such as resource limitations and digital literacy gaps.

The third subtheme, points to the need for nurturing not only cognitive skills but also social, emotional, and ethical development. A holistic approach recognizes the whole learner and encourages supportive classroom climates where empathy, collaboration, and reflective practices thrive. This comprehensive focus helps prepare Gen Z students to navigate complex real-world challenges beyond academic knowledge alone.

Modernizing education for Generation Z demands systemic changes that integrate flexible pedagogy, robust technology infrastructure, and holistic development frameworks. Policymakers must champion reforms that provide adequate resources and incentives for such innovation, while school administrators should cultivate environments that balance academic rigor with social-emotional learning and well-being.

The implications from these main themes collectively call for a paradigm shift in education to effectively engage and empower Generation Z learners. This shift requires embracing technology, fostering adaptability, connecting learning to authentic contexts, supporting continuous professional growth, and nurturing holistic development. Educational stakeholders at all levels must collaborate to create dynamic, flexible, and inclusive learning environments that prepare students for the demands and opportunities of the 21st century.

This study is deeply anchored in two foundational theories: Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and Generational Theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991), both of which provide valuable lenses for understanding the teaching and learning dynamics observed with Generation Z students.

Social Constructivism emphasizes that learning is a social process, where knowledge is constructed through interaction, collaboration, and active engagement within a community. The study's findings strongly align with this perspective, as teachers highlighted the importance of interactive and student-centered teaching approaches, collaborative learning activities, and establishing meaningful communication with students. Generation Z learners thrive in environments where they can actively participate, share ideas, and co-construct knowledge alongside peers and educators, rather than passively receiving information. The integration of technology, multimedia, and personalized feedback further supports the scaffolding process central to Social Constructivism, allowing teachers to guide students through tailored learning experiences that address their unique needs and learning styles.

On the other hand, Generational Theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991) provides a framework to understand how the shared experiences, cultural context, and technological immersion of Generation Z shape their values, behaviors, and learning preferences. The study's results reveal that Generation Z students expect instant gratification, clear results, and highly interactive and technology-driven learning environments, all characteristics consistent with this generational cohort's traits as described by the theory. Teachers' adaptation to these preferences by incorporating digital tools, fostering flexible learning environments, and emphasizing relevance and engagement reflects an understanding of the generational mindset that influences how students interact with knowledge and authority.

Future Directions

Building on the findings of this study, future efforts to enhance the educational experiences of Generation Z learners must be comprehensive and collaborative. The rapid evolution of learning preferences, particularly the demand for technology integration, interactive engagement, and holistic development, requires targeted strategies at multiple levels of the educational system. Key stakeholders, including the Department of Education (DepEd), school leaders, and teachers, play critical roles in shaping responsive learning environments that meet the unique needs of today's students. The following future directions outline actionable recommendations tailored to each group to support this transformative journey.

For the Department of Education (DepEd),

A primary focus should be on strengthening technology infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to digital resources nationwide. Through expanding reliable internet connectivity, upgrading hardware, and providing up-to-date software across schools especially in underserved and rural areas DepEd can bridge the digital divide and empower both teachers and students to fully utilize technology-enhanced learning. Alongside infrastructure improvements, it is imperative to design comprehensive professional development programs that are ongoing, context-specific, and practical.

These initiatives should emphasize digital literacy, interactive teaching strategies, and effective management of Generation Z's distinct learning behaviors. Providing continuous mentorship and support will help sustain teacher growth and adaptability in a rapidly changing educational landscape. Furthermore, curricular reforms must embrace flexibility and holistic approaches, integrating real-world relevance and social-emotional learning to personalize student experiences while maintaining core educational standards. Finally, DepEd should institutionalize collaborative learning communities by facilitating regional and national forums, online platforms, and peer mentoring networks that encourage knowledge sharing, professional support, and collective problem-solving among educators.

For School Heads

Fostering a supportive and innovative school culture is crucial. School leaders must model calm, flexible, and adaptive leadership to cultivate environments where teachers feel empowered to experiment with new pedagogies

and technologies. Prioritizing access to relevant teacher training and instructional resources aligned with Generation Z's needs is essential.

This includes allocating time and resources to professional development and the integration of digital tools. Enhancing communication and support systems is also vital; school heads should establish regular feedback mechanisms among teachers, students, parents, and the wider community, facilitating collaborative planning and emotional support networks. Encouraging reflective and holistic practices among teachers will promote continuous improvement, while nurturing the intellectual, social, and emotional dimensions of students to create well-rounded learning environments.

For Teachers

Embracing continuous learning and adaptability is a key future direction. Educators should actively participate in professional growth opportunities such as workshops, seminars, and peer learning focused on technology use, learner-centered pedagogy, and Generation Z's learning preferences. Moving beyond basic use of technology, teachers need to meaningfully integrate digital tools that foster interaction, collaboration, and personalized feedback. Designing engaging, flexible, and student-centered lessons that incorporate multimedia, gamification, and collaborative projects will better cater to diverse learning styles and keep students motivated. Building positive relationships and fostering inclusive classrooms where open communication and respect for diversity prevail will empower students emotionally and socially.

Finally, teachers must regularly engage in self-reflection and innovation, seeking feedback from students and colleagues to refine their teaching practices and remain responsive to evolving educational demands.

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