

Qualitative Study on Generation 'Z' Digital Age and its impacts on Students at tertiary level of Education in Nigeria: A Review

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Abstract

Generation Z is born and raised between 1995 and today with the social web. They are digital centric and technology is their identity. This generation will be entering into the society/world of work in the years to come but little is known in Nigeria of this generation about their characteristics, needs, attributes and the role of institutions of learning to properly position them for the world of work. They seem to have different attitudes towards work than the previous generations. Without proper understanding of this generation, organizations will find it difficult to hire and retain them for the sustainable growth of the organizations. By understanding them, the companies can determine what can impact their recruitment and retention success through paying attention to what makes this generation tick in the workplace. This paper therefore, examines the characteristics and preferences for engaging Generation Z learners for impactful learning experiences and smooth transition from school to the world of work. Conclusively, the study concludes among others that mentorship; stable internet connectivity and multi-media devices should form integral teaching and learning procedures for educating generation Z to capture their attention.

Keywords: Generation Z, Education, Strategic, Teaching, Workplace.

Introduction

In every economy, the role of education cannot be overemphasized. The development of any nation is as a result of the strong educational structure of the nation. The products of the educational processes serve as the input human resources that employers will feed on. Therefore, the educational processes provide the needed manpower to drive the economy. However, while employers are finding it hard to identify and realize the needs of the Generation X and Y in the 21st century, there is a now completely new generation i.e., Generation Z to work with. Generation Z are children born between 1995 to date. The challenges of the organizations are not only to serve the Generations X and Y, but also to foresee the workplace needs of the rising Generation Z so that groups comprising of different generations can work effectively (Knoll, 2014). Researchers have demonstrated that each generation has different attitudes towards work and workplace (CIPD, 2008).

In Nigeria, little is known of this Generation Z about their characteristics, needs, attributes and work style. Therefore, employers should anticipate workplace needs and change their strategy for recruiting, motivating and retaining these emerging young workers who will be arriving very soon from the educational institutions. It is crucial to understand them, to keep talent from the newest generation and realize their benefits to sustain the growth of the organizations. By understanding the characteristics and the preferences of the Generation Z, recruiters will be able to attract and connect them in order to groom them to become the future leaders of the company. Without this proper understanding, organisations will find it difficult in recruiting and retaining the best talented candidates of the Generation Z and will also fail to motivate and inspire them which in turn will impact the organizational performances.

In order to make the most of academic opportunities, educational institutions must consider the dispositions and needs of their students. Effective instructors often invest significant effort to understand, teach, and support their students who seem younger (and perhaps more “foreign”) each year. Most active university faculty is Baby Boomers and Generation-Xers (a.k.a. Busters) who are now teaching primarily Gen-Y and Z undergraduate students. Bridging the possible divide between older and younger

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generations can be stimulating and affords an opportunity to rethink of whom the current students are and what they need and want as learners and how they can be impacted positively.

Generation 'Z' Generation

Gen Zers were born between the years 1995 to date. They follow other generations, who also impacted society in various ways, such as the Veterans (1925-1944), Baby Boomers (1945-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), and Generation Y (1981-1995). Each of these groups is extremely distinct when considering values, goals, and ideals. Each new generation has been associated with various characteristics and traits that loosely define them as a cohesive group (McCrindle, 2016). These associated characteristics are based on the economic conditions, cultural norms, technological advances, and world events, all helping to shape the thoughts and views of each generation. Education/training being the vehicle that inculcates the values will be very relevant and out to strategize for better productivity.

How is Generation Z different from previous generations?

1. They have never known a world without Internet, cell phones, or iPods.
2. They are tech savvy and in constant contact with people 24/7 using Facebook, Twitter 2go, and other social media platforms.
3. They want technology that is easy to use and will solve their problems, help coordinate their activities, or provide them with relevant people or information.
4. Their brains are affected by Internet use. They find answers to questions in Google and YouTube, but they lack the critical thinking skills to evaluate sources.
5. They have low/no tolerance for being without digital resources.
6. They have never had to use a library card catalogue or going through shelves to find a specific book.
7. They don't use wristwatches or alarm clocks except those with Bluetooth because they use their smartphones for that most times.
8. Instead of reading an article, they want to watch a video (YouTube) that summarizes it.
9. They may never send an email: [that is "so yesterday"]. Why email when you can text, instant message, tweet or FaceBook?
10. They use a texting "slanguage." Examples: Cray Cray (when life is too crazy for one word), Probs (other generations say probably), Totes (used to show agreement—totally), XOXOX (used to end any text. For Baby Boomers it means sincerely yours), V (very) and I (because I am the center of everything).

Generation Z also known as Gen Zers, and Digital natives. The use of fast-paced multimedia technology has had an impact on their learning expectations and values in a number of ways. Fast foods are not left out of their lives since services for them are also interneted. Below are some concepts credited to Gen Z thinkers:

First, there is a noticeable difference in the shortened attention span of these learners.

This generation has been exposed to a constant stream of short segments of information and clips not more than 6 seconds to 5 minutes including Facebook posts and you-tube videos. As described by Darla Rothman, "With online text, learners now spend about eight seconds picking hyperlinked keywords to find answers instead of reading the whole text, which calculates to 4.4 seconds per 200 words of text" (Rothman, n.d.). As a result, they often exhibit what John Raley of Harvard Medical School coined as "acquired attention deficit disorder" (Fudin, 2012). A related noticeable impact is on the ability of these learners to concentrate and focus longer, on more complex problems or get involved solving problems.

Second, the use of multimedia devices has resulted in an increased development of the visual ability portion of these learners' cognitive functions

Visual forms of learning, such as picture, video games, and videos seem to be more interesting to these learners and more effective. Rothman, again, details this observation thus: Some research has shown that the brains of Generation Z (Digital Natives) are structurally different than those of earlier generations. This has nothing to do with genetics and everything to do with how they use their brains to respond to things in the environment. The brains of Generation Zs have become wired to sophisticated, complex visual imagery. As a result, the part of the brain responsible for visual ability is far more developed, making visual forms of learning more effective, while auditory learning (lecture and discussion) is very strongly disliked by this age group. Interactive games, collaborative projects, advance organizers, challenges, and anything that they can try and see are appreciated best (Rothman, n.d.).

Third, Gen Zers' easy access to information creates an expectation of instant results and constant feedback

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They expect answers immediately and may often not want to spend the time to ensure the legitimacy or reliability of the sources they find (Fudin, 2012). Gen Zers' familiarity with technology has also provided them with positive traits. To this group of students, technology is not something to be feared, but an accustomed tool to embrace. Gen Zers are not afraid to try new things, experiment, or explore. They take opportunities to research whatever interests them, often online. They do not fear connecting globally with others, and are more tolerant of cultural differences (Fudin, 2012).

Gen Zers have grown up amid the economic decline in world markets that mark the Great Recession. They have experienced a post 9/11 world with reports of on-going terrorist attacks. They have grown up in an environment where school violence of a horrific scale is now not an uncommon phenomenon. These events have made Gen Zers more cautious and security prone. Thus, hardship and security has given them most of their personality.

Societal Factors: Shaping Behaviors and Thoughts Regarding Threats, Risks, and Hazards

The ways in which people are raised and the environments that surround them have significant influence on how individuals learn, behave, and interact. Parents are the first influencers, beginning when children enter the world. As a child grows and is exposed to various societal and environmental factors, his or her social skills and behavioral traits develop and grow with the child. Although no two individuals are identical, generational groups tend to experience common external influencers (e.g., disasters) that formulate broad general characteristics for entire age groups. They feel special/unique and do not know how to loss well. These influencers and the traits are:

Parental influencers

Parenting styles certainly contribute to the ways in which members of each generation view the world around them. The majority of those in Generation Z are being raised by Generation X parents (born 1965–1980), which differ from Millennials' Baby Boomer parents (born 1946–1964) in several key ways:

- (a) As a much smaller population than the Baby Boomers, Generation X does not have as well-defined generational characteristics;
- (b) Many in Generation X grew up with two working parents, so balancing work and family is instilled early; and
- (c) The independence they had during their youth is reflected in Generation X's parenting style (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Unlike some generational groups before them, members of Generation Z group view their parents as role models and mentors they can confide in and trust to guide them in the right direction when faced with difficult tasks and decisions (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Therefore teaching/attracting the attention of this generation demands that, Coaches and teachers use mentoring or guiding approaches, rather than enforcing and influencing approaches, in order to play significant roles in the lives Generation Z members, reach their goals and objectives (Short, 2014). Unlike previous generations, political leaders, celebrities, and professional athletes do not have the interpersonal connection that this generation craves and thus fewer of them look to these public figures as role models (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). With a strong mentoring foundation, Generation Z would be more grounded and independent, with a stronger work ethic and desire to solve problems, than its Millennial predecessor (Wiedmer, 2015).

Social skills and behavioral traits

The term "social skills" encompasses five unique parts that employers rank highly: coordination, instruction, persuasion, service orientation, and social perceptiveness (Kick et al., 2015). In the case of Generation Z, an over reliance on technological devices and social media can hinder the development of some social skills. However, not many things are inherently bad, so technology could actually introduce new and innovative ways to develop social and other skills (e.g., by exposing them to the world beyond their communities and opening their minds to new ideas, thus stimulating out-of-the-box thinking).

Generation Z group is growing up in a world where people of different races and genders hold various leadership positions. Millennials (sometimes referred to as the "Me Generation") learned to tolerate such diversity more so than previous generations, whereas Generation Z learned not only to tolerate but to celebrate it (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). This new generation views diversity more as a benefit than a detriment to society as social circles continue to become more diverse. With a more "we-centric" than "me-centric" attitude, a smaller sense of entitlement and a greater desire for social equality than its predecessor, Generation Z tends to support issues and concerns that affect the broader community (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Educational Factors: Differentiating Educational Opportunities from previous Generations

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Education is considered the foundation of success for students in Generation Z. However, as the cost of higher education increases, this generation is becoming more concerned about the cost and is formulating alternative, less expensive options for achieving high levels of education. To this generation, education equates to jobs and jobs equate to survival, especially as jobs become harder to find (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Options this generation is considering include online programs, community colleges, and technical and vocational colleges—all of which avoid on-campus amenities such as room and board and play a growing role as more Generation Z students graduate from school.

Learning Styles

Generation Z recognizes the value in education and has a strong desire to learn, but not necessarily in a traditional college or university environment. From Millennials to Generation Z, the value placed on higher education has decreased from 71% to 64%, respectively (Marron, 2015). Four themes provide an insight into Generation Z's educational perspective: (a) education leads to success; (b) education is an investment in the country's future; (c) society as a whole is better when it is educated; and (d) access to quality education is limited (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Despite the concern of increasing tuitions, the majority of Generation Z still views the value of higher education outweighing the cost in order to secure a solid career. However, as students strive to learn in an educational environment, the way in which they learn is changing and offering them more robust learning experiences. Although they require education, often times they do not fashion using the certificate since they venture into many types of jobs.

Attracting Students

Given the general over view of Generation Z as a generation that have never known a world without Internet, cell phones, or iPods; they are tech savvy and in constant contact with people 24/7 using Facebook, Twitter 2go, and other social media platforms; they want technology that is easy to use and will solve their problems, help coordinate their activities, or provide them with relevant people or information; their brains are affected by Internet use. They find answers to questions in Google and YouTube, but they lack the critical thinking skills to evaluate sources; they have low/no tolerance for being without digital resources. Attracting this generation to learning to actualize their dreams and aspirations and be useful to themselves and the society at large will mean understanding them, their traits, and preferences.

Utilize video-based learning

Capitalize on Generation Z's interest in learning through observation by using videos and other visuals to help explain a theory or concept or to demonstrate a challenging process. Videos of effective speakers, such as TED Talks, can also bring content to life and help students ponder difficult questions. In addition, apps like Jing and Camtasia, which allow users to make voice-over instructional videos, can be useful for prerecording videos to help students understand a process, such as filling out student organization paperwork or completing a class project successfully.

Incorporate intrapersonal learning into class and group work

Consider breaking a project into multiple "checkpoints" along the way that provide opportunities for individual learning and reflection before having students complete group "checkpoints" later in the process. In addition, have students engage in what Frank Lyman calls Think-Pair-Share in which students reflect on information before discussing it with a partner and ultimately sharing it with the larger group. Finally, intrapersonal learning fits nicely with a flipped learning approach. Rather than assigning homework, which often is done after the learning occurs, have students pre-reflect on content to prepare them for the upcoming session.

Offer community engagement opportunities for students to address underlying societal needs

For example, offer case competitions in which students compete in developing business plans designed to solve a local issue, set up hack-a-thons and ask students to develop technology to address a social issue, or provide seed money to start businesses with a social mission. They can come up with more ideas that will benefit the community/society.

Connect Generation Z students to internship opportunities

Because Generation Z students want their educational experience to incorporate practical learning opportunities from the beginning; they may not want to wait until their later college years to acquire an internship. Thus, it may be beneficial for institutions to offer on- and off-campus internship opportunities that are developmentally appropriate for younger or less-experienced students. Even with Nigerian unemployment situations, entrepreneurship activities can do great assistance.

Storytelling

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Research indicated that Gen Z students are interested in the stories of their peers and that they prefer to get some of their information through YouTube. To attract students, programs can regularly develop and rotate through student video stories on their web site. These stories can focus on topics such as a student's internship, a competitive event, student organizations, a first year experience, or a graduate's first job or career path. Many universities are doing this at the institution or college level, but finding resources to provide this resource at the program level may be more difficult. Institutions' public relations departments may be able to provide a script, template or editing resources to help programs create their own videos.

Early Program Interaction

Develop a freshmen level general studies course in which students are introduced to the computer science major or gain hands on skills in App development early. Such an introduction may draw students from other areas of the institution to select computer science as a major or minor, as well as develop a relationship with students who had already intended to take a computer science major.

Competitive Events

Holding competitions such as hackathons or App development contests will challenge students as well as address their need for a personalized experience. Participation in collegiate level competitions also allows students to practice their skills and interact with likeminded students and professionals. The authors' institution encourages students to be involved in student organizations that participate in state, regional and national level competitions such as the Midwest Regional Collegiate Cyber Defense Qualification Competition and Phi Beta Lambda/FBLA, adobe.spark.com and so on.

Online or Blended Courses

Gen Z students are self-starters who do not mind learning topics on their own. Online technology courses taught by adjunct professionals or current courses taught in a blended online/face-to-face format may help to attract students while not significantly draining current resources.

Gaming Techniques

Although imaginative learning is not as integrated in the core educational curriculum as in past generations, it is being integrated into modern gaming techniques. The term "gamification" in the information technology world refers to the concept of "adding 'amusement' to the tedium of day-to-day living" (Renen & Rudman, 2015). By injecting fun and rewards into the learning process, educators, mentors, and employers can better motivate younger generations, especially those who cannot be motivated with money and power. With various uses, gamification offers an engaging way to conduct trainings and instill organizational concepts and practices. Although the terms "games," "gamification," and "game-based learning or serious games" are often used interchangeably, they have distinct differences, as defined below:

- i. Games are games developed for entertainment (e.g., Candy Crush, Angry Birds)
- ii. Gamification has game-type elements used in a nongame setting (e.g., advertising, workforce development); and
- iii. Game-based learning and serious games are games with an identified outcome. They are developed with behavior modification, change behavior/persona, or provide acclimation to something new with a very specific outcome (e.g., military games, PrepBiz).

In what is termed "engagement knowledge," is further explained thus: Game-based learning and serious games address cognitive and non-cognitive skills to implement change especially in emergency and life-threatening situations. Game-based learning or serious games are often custom built to fulfill a specific purpose (e.g., recruiting, training, communicating) for targeted participants (Allal-Cherif & Makhoul, 2016). Sarkis et al., (2014) on the other hand opined that for recruiting purposes, the games can be used for orientation to help participants identify skills appropriate with various roles, to help employers select talent from a group of candidates, and to help employees integrate into a new work environment. In terms of training purposes, the games can be used for acquiring knowledge, refining skills and role responsibilities, developing expected behavior, and advancing professional development is reiterated. While for communication purposes, games can be used as internal or external communication tools to strengthen the internal working culture or to build socially responsible messaging, respectively.

Conclusion

Generation Z is a unique generation whose needs, learning activities, expectations, perspectives, and aspirations are different from those of other generation before it. A generation that never knows a world without Internet, cell phones, or iPods, have low/no tolerance for being without digital resources, want a technology that is easy to use and will solve their problems, help

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coordinate their activities, or provide them with relevant people or information. Available literature/researches on how best to educate this generation emphasized coaching and mentoring or guiding approaches rather enforcing and influencing approach play significant roles in their lives to help Generation Z members reach their goals and objectives of being useful to themselves and the society at large. Generation Z learning styles recognizes that (a) education leads to success; (b) education is an investment in the country's future; (c) society as a whole is better when it is educated; and (d) access to quality education is limited. Therefore, for Nigeria to succeed with this generation, concerted efforts should be put into making our teaching and learning environment information and communication technology (ICT) complaint. Affordable and non-fluctuating internet facilities/network should be at the disposal of the learners – Gen Zers. Electricity supply must be at its best to encourage 24/7 accessibility to online connectivity with friends and colleagues that give them joy and spur them to greater challenges. Finally, parents should also key into the desire of their children to make them access the world from the comfort of their homes.

Suggestions

Successful educating of generation Z requires providing the enabling environment that possesses the characteristic features of generation Z, as such:

- i. Multi-media devices which aid visual forms of learning be made available in our institutions of learning to capture their attention.
- ii. Studies shows that this generation has great respect for their parents as role model and mentors, therefore, for successful teaching and learning experiences of this generation, mentorship training should be applied rather than enforcing approach.
- iii. This generation is wired to ease access to information via the internet 24/7 hence it encouraged them for individualized learning and enforces their confidence. Environment without internet connectivity will be boring and discouraging to them which can impede their learning processes.

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