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BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL GAP: A STUDY INTO LECTURERS' AND STUDENTS' CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the generational gap between lecturers and students in higher education through narrative inquiry. In many universities, Generation X and Millennial lecturers teach classrooms filled predominantly with Generation Y students. These generational differences influence teaching and learning practices, communication styles, and approaches to technology. Rather than relying on quantitative measures, this study adopts a qualitative narrative approach to capture the lived experiences of both lecturers and students. Stories will be collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and reflective journals, allowing participants to describe their perspectives on classroom interactions. The analysis will identify themes such as technology as both a bridge and a barrier, tensions between authority and facilitation, and moments of connection and disconnection across generations. Findings show that while generational differences can create misunderstandings, they also open opportunities for deeper engagement and mutual learning. The study concludes that bridging generational gaps in higher education requires valuing diverse teaching identities, integrating technology thoughtfully, and fostering inclusive approaches that meet students' evolving needs.

Keywords: *generational gap, narrative inquiry, Gen X, Gen Y, Millennials*

Introduction

Higher education classrooms today serve as an intersection of multiple generations, where on one side are the lecturers, often from Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996), while on the other side are the students, most of whom belong to Generation Y. The differences in age and generational experiences affect more than just demographics but also the teaching methods, learning preferences, communication styles, and the way technology is used in the classroom.

Exploring the classroom based on narrative inquiry allows us to understand these generational differences not through numbers or statistics, but through real stories. Narratives reveal how both lecturers and students experience, how they perceive one another, and how moments of connection or disconnection unfold in real learning environments. The aim of this study is to explore how Gen X and Millennial lecturers narrate their teaching experiences with Gen Y students, how Gen Y students

perceive their lecturers, and what kinds of stories emerge about challenges and opportunities in these inter generational encounters.

Problem Statement

The generational gap between lecturers and students in higher education presents both challenges and opportunities in the teaching and learning process. Lecturers, primarily from Generation X and the Millennial generation, often employ pedagogical practices shaped by their own formative experiences. On the other hand, current students mostly belong to Generation Y which frequently described as digital natives (Lahuerta-Otero et al., 2019). These differences influence classroom expectations, communication styles, and approaches to technology. For instance, Generation X lecturers are often associated with structured, pragmatic methods, while Millennial lecturers tend to prefer collaborative and technology-driven approaches (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Meanwhile, Generation Y students expect interactive, flexible, and technology-supported learning environments. These mismatched expectations can create tension, misunderstandings, and gaps in classroom engagement. Despite the importance of this issue, limited qualitative research has focused on how both lecturers and students narrate and make sense of these inter-generational encounters (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Addressing this gap is critical in fostering inclusive teaching strategies that embrace generational diversity.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Explore how Generation X and Millennial lecturers narrate their teaching experiences with Generation Y students.
2. Examine how Generation Y students perceive their classroom interactions with lecturers from different generations.
3. Identify the challenges within inter generational classroom encounters.
4. Investigate the role of technology, authority, and facilitation in shaping points of connection and misconnection between lecturers and students.

Literature Review

Generational theory suggests that people from the same age cohort share certain values, habits, and worldviews shaped by the events and conditions of their formative years (Moisescu & Gică, 2020). In education, this translates into significant differences in how various generations view authority, independence, collaboration, and the use of technology.

Generation X lecturers are often characterized as practical, independent, and shaped by a pre-digital learning environment. They may prefer structured, disciplined approaches in teaching and expect students to take responsibility for their own learning. In contrast, Millennial lecturers, who are closer in age to their students, are typically seen as more collaborative and tech-savvy. They are often comfortable with digital platforms, online learning tools, and interactive approaches that engage students more directly (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

Generation Y students, who dominate current higher education settings, are considered digital natives where they have grown up with technology and often expect learning to be interactive, flexible, and supported by digital tools. They value immediate feedback (Raslie, Pit & Ting, 2016), active participation, and practical applications of what they learn (Carter, 2008). These generational dynamics can lead to tension, but also to opportunities for richer teaching and learning when approached thoughtfully.

Narrative inquiry has been widely used in education to capture the lived stories of teachers and students. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), stories are focus on how people make sense of their experiences. By focusing on personal experiences, narrative inquiry allows researchers to uncover how individuals interpret events, challenges, and relationships in ways that statistics cannot. For the present study, narrative inquiry provides the opportunity to explore how generational differences in higher education are experienced and told by both lecturers and students.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. The goal is not to measure the generational gap in numerical terms but to understand the lecturers' and students' experiences and interpret it based on their personal stories.

The participants included a group of ten lecturers from both Generation X and the Millennial generation, along with fifteen undergraduate students representing Generation Y. A purposive sampling method was used to ensure that participants come from different academic disciplines, to allow diverse classroom experiences. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with lecturers and focus group discussions with students. These methods gave space for participants to share their stories in their own words, providing insight into how they perceive and navigate generational differences in the classroom.

The narratives was analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves identifying recurring storyline and themes across participants' accounts (Riessman, 2008). Likely themes may include the role of technology in teaching and learning, the tension between authority and facilitation, and moments of connection or disconnection between students and lecturers. Ethical considerations was the center

of the study, which included informed consent, confidentiality, and the respectful handling of participants' stories.

Findings and Discussion

Intuitive inquiry prioritizes the actual experiences of participants and thus provides more insights into this study. Even the perspectives of Generation X and Millennial lecturers is distinct, they were united by the same problem which is adaptation fatigue. Gen X lecturers often described their experiences as professional responsibility and earned authority, expressing an intuitive sense that their foundational training was being challenged by a new learning culture. Their Millennial counterparts whom act as generational intermediaries, felt a more internal conflict, intuitively sensing a tension between their desire for a collaborative, democratic classroom and the institutional pressure to maintain traditional standards of rigor and discipline, leaving them feeling caught between two worlds.

The perceptions of Generation Y students provided a crucial reflection to the lecturers' experiences. Their interpretation of what constitutes authentic teaching varied significantly. They frequently naturally perceived many Gen X lecturers' expert-led, disciplined style as a sign of disengagement and a lack of interest in their personal development. In contrast, while they leaned towards the relatable and accessible style of Millennial lecturers, some students intuitively questioned the depth of their expertise, worrying that a focus on facilitation might affect the knowledge transmission.

The first challenge focused on technology as both a bridge and a barrier. Millennial lecturers use digital tools effectively, making learning more engaging and accessible. Students also shared experiences where some Gen X lecturers are less comfortable with technology. However, students did understand and recognize the value of Gen X lecturers' emphasis on critical thinking and discipline, which complements their reliance on digital learning.

The second challenge involves authority versus facilitation. Gen X lecturers express difficulties in maintaining authority in classrooms where students expect collaborative and participatory learning. Meanwhile, Millennial lecturers face challenges in balancing a more relaxed, facilitative teaching style with the need to maintain professional boundaries. These contrasting narratives highlighted how generational values shaped teaching identities and student expectations.

The third challenge relates to moments of connection and disconnection where students and lecturers shared stories of misunderstandings concerning different expectations about feedback speed, participation and classroom etiquette. At the same time, both groups recounted positive experiences where generational differences taught them to develop mutual respect and meaningful connections.

These stories reveal that generational diversity in the classroom can be a source of both tension and opportunity, depending on how the situation is handled.

Lastly, the findings suggest that technology, authority, and facilitation play intertwined roles in shaping the classroom dynamic between lecturers and students. On one hand, technology provides a common ground, enabling interactive learning tools and online platforms that encourage collaboration and engagement. However, generational differences in digital articulateness sometimes create moments of disconnection, with students expecting immediate apprehension and interactivity while some lecturers prioritize traditional pedagogical methods. Authority emerged as another point of tension where students increasingly value democratic and ideological learning environments. On the contrary, Gen X lecturers often perceive that there is a need to maintain hierarchical boundaries to preserve discipline and academic rigorousness. Facilitation, therefore, becomes the mediating factor where Millennial lecturers prefer to adopt flexible, student-centered strategies and tend to transform authority into guidance rather than control thus enabling a more meaningful exchange of perspectives. The interplay of these elements highlights that bridging the generational gap requires balancing respect for authority with openness to technological innovation and facilitative teaching practices.

Conclusion

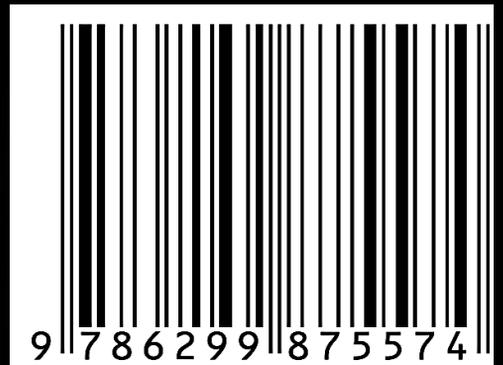
The generational gap between Gen X and Millennial lecturers and Gen Y students represents more than a difference in age where it reflects broader shifts in culture, technology, and pedagogy. Through narrative inquiry, this study highlighted the real experiences of both lecturers and students which offers insight into how generational perspectives shape teaching and learning in higher education.

The findings contribute to understanding classroom dynamics but also offer practical implications. Universities may use these insights to design professional development for lecturers while promoting the thoughtful use of technology, and encourage approaches that honor both traditional teaching values and contemporary student expectations. Ultimately, bridging the generational gap is not about erasing differences, but about valuing them as opportunities to build more inclusive and dynamic learning environments.

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