

Teaching Approaches of Gen Z Teachers in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the approaches used by Generation Z (Gen Z) educators in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and how these strategies are used and understood to influence the young students. Based on a qualitative phenomenological design, ten (10) Gen Z teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis to analyze the data. Results indicated that Gen Z teachers mostly use technology integrated, play, experiential and learner centered methods to support engagement and developmentally suitable learning experiences. The practices help in cognitive, social-emotional and behavioral development of children as well as encourage active involvement and significance of interaction. The paper indicates the significance of sustaining innovative and inclusive practices in early childhood education that is supported by professional development and institutional policies to help teachers in Gen Z.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Generation Z Teachers, Teaching Approach, Use of technology, Play Based Learning, Learner based instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is important in determining the cognitive, social, emotional as well as behavioral development of children. In this initial phase, educators play the role of not only a learning facilitator, but an engagement, interaction, and developmental growth nurturer. With the changing nature of education in the 21 st century, there has also been a change in approaches used in instruction towards learner centered approaches, technology enhanced approaches as well as developmentally appropriate approaches to meet the needs of modern learners.

Teachers of Generation Z have been adopted as known as digital natives and are joining the teaching field with unique technological fluency and collaborative inclinations. Their knowledge of the digital tools and the desire to learn in the interactive teaching environment affect their teaching methods, especially in early childhood. Researchers indicate that Gen Z teachers are more likely to adopt diverse, multimodal, and inclusive practice, which facilitates interaction and comprehensive growth in young learners.

Although the research on the influence of generational differences on teaching has increased, there are few studies that explored the type of teaching methods practiced by Gen Z teachers in the early childhood education sector in the Philippine setting. Majority of the available studies deal with upper grade levels or overall patterns of instruction. This paper fills this gap by discussing the way Gen Z educators can plan and execute developmentally appropriate instruction and the ways the strategies employed by them impact learning experiences of children.

The proposed research is structured around the Technological-Motivational-Learning Theory, Self Determination Theory, and Contemporary Constructivist Learning Theory that will allow finding out the teaching strategies used by Gen Z educators, how they apply to early childhood classrooms, and what effects they are believed to have on young students.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences of Generation Z teachers in early childhood education. The phenomenology approach was the right fit in this study because it aims at knowing how people interpret and derive meaning of their experiences in a particular situation.

The respondents were ten (10) Generation Z teaching teachers who are already working in the early childhood education environment in selected private schools in San Fernando City, La Union. The sampling was based on criterion to make sure that the respondents fit the following criteria: (1) the participants are of Generation Z, (2) the respondents are currently teaching in early childhood education, (3) the respondents have at least one year of teaching experience, and (4) the respondents participated in the study by their own choice.

The semi-structured interview guide was designed as a data collection tool, and it was clarified and validated by the education experts. The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed word-to-word with the participants consent.

Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data, and it entailed familiarization of the data, generation of initial codes, theme identification, theme review and refinement, definition and naming of themes, and the final report. Reflexivity was exercised during the analysis process to provide trustworthiness to the research since it reduced the researcher bias during the analysis and the emergence of themes was done based on the narratives of the participants.

RESULTS

This study explored the teaching approaches of Generation Z teachers in Early Childhood Education (ECE), their utilization in classroom practice, and the perceived impacts on young learners. Data were gathered from interviews with ten (10) Gen Z teachers using thematic analysis.

Theme 1. Teaching Approaches Practiced by Gen Z Teachers in ECE

Three major themes emerged regarding the teaching approaches of Gen Z teachers:

Technology Integration as a Learning Tool. Gen Z teachers commonly integrate digital resources such as videos, songs, and interactive applications to enhance engagement and comprehension among young learners. Technology is used not merely for entertainment but as a pedagogical tool to present concepts visually and interactively.

Play-Based and Experiential Learning. Play-based and hands-on learning strategies are widely practiced. Teachers emphasize learning through games, activities, and exploration, allowing children to actively construct knowledge while developing cognitive, social, and emotional skills.

Learner-Centered and Inclusive Approaches. Instruction is adapted to address learners' diverse needs, interests, and abilities. Teachers employ flexible strategies, one-on-one support, and differentiated activities to ensure inclusive and meaningful learning experiences.

These approaches reflect Gen Z teachers' preference for interactive, child-centered, and developmentally appropriate practices.

Theme 2. Utilization of Gen Z Teaching Approaches in Early Childhood Education

Table 1. presents the utilization of Gen Z teaching approaches in Early Childhood Education. The table summarizes how each approach is applied in the classroom, including specific examples and observed learning outcomes based on participants' responses.

Under this research question, three (3) themes emerged: (1) Integrating Learning into Daily Routines and Play, (2) Encouraging Active and Hands-On Learning and (3) Using Assessment to Guide Instruction

Themes

Core ideas

Integrating Learning into Daily Routines and Play

Lessons are embedded in daily routines, exercises, and playtime to promote natural and meaningful learning.

Encouraging Active and Hands-On Learning

Learners actively engage in tasks that involve doing, creating, and exploring to deepen understanding.

Using Assessment to Guide Instruction

Formal and informal assessments are used to evaluate understanding and adjust teaching strategies.

Results show that Gen Z teachers maximize routine activities and play as learning opportunities, prioritize experiential participation, and continuously assess learners to guide instruction.

Theme 3. Perceived Impacts of Gen Z Teaching Approaches on Young Learners

Themes

Core ideas

Holistic Development of Learners

Development of academic, emotional, social, and spiritual domains.

Enhanced Engagement and Positive Behavior

Increased participation, motivation, and improved classroom behavior.

Strengthened Teacher–Child Relationship

Improved trust, emotional connection, and learner responsiveness.

The results indicate that Gen Z teaching approaches contribute positively to children’s overall development, classroom engagement, and teacher–child relationships.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that Generation Z educators are more likely to apply technology based instructions, play-based instructions, and instruction centered on learners in early childhood classrooms. They are the current trends in pedagogy that are practised in the modern world which is more interactive, inclusive and developmental.

The incorporation of technology as a learning device shows the ability of Gen Z teachers to employ digital learning in order to achieve attention, visualization, and interaction. Respondents reported the purposeful application of multimedia resources and interactive resources to scaffold learning. This is in line with the Constructivist Learning Theory that focuses on the fact that learners are actively involved in building knowledge by interacting with tools and environments (Schunk, 2020). The current literature confirms this point of view, demonstrating that the incorporation of digital resources in early childhood development contributes to better early literacy and interest in young children (Neumann, 2022; Dong and Newman, 2021).

Experiential and play-based learning became also major practices. The focus was put on practical tasks and exploration, which directed children to learn through meaningful engagement by the teachers. The discovery-based learning research conducted by Flores et al. (2025) identified that outdoor learning is much more useful in building environmental skills in daycare learners, which also supports the importance of experiential

education in the early childhood context. These data also confirm the findings of current literature according to which guided play enhances executive activities, socializing, and problem-solving skills (Zosh et al., 2022).

Inclusive and learner-based approaches are also indicative of Self-Determination Theory principles (Ryan and Deci, 2020), as autonomy, competence, and relatedness are identified as motivation factors. Teachers shared the process of adjusting the instruction according to the interests and readiness of learners and encouraging equal participation and confidence. Pozas et al. (2021) also found that in various classes, differentiated and learner-centered practices positively affect engagement and inclusivity.

The three identified positive effects, such as holistic growth, increased involvement, and improved teacher-children relationships, can be aligned with the principles of relational and whole-child educational theories. Ong (2025) stated that social presence has a lot of impact on the learning outcomes and satisfaction, which makes the effective teacher learner interaction important. The results of the research would indicate that Gen Z teachers can create emotionally supportive and developmentally appropriate learning environments that are beneficial to young learners in various aspects.

Overall, the findings prove that the teaching practices practiced by Gen Z teachers are theoretically rationale, pragmatically sensitive, and driven by the postulates of modern early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

The current research findings demonstrate that the use of interactive, technology-based, and learner centered practice in early childhood education by Generation Z teachers is consistent with the developmental and theoretical perspectives of the present day. Their instructional practices are consciously based on the introduction of digital tools, experience learning, and differentiation to help young learners engage and develop holistically.

The results further show that integrating learning into everyday activities, facilitating active engagement, and employing instructional assessment based learning are some of the aspects contributing to purposeful and developmentally relevant learning. Moreover, the teacher child relations which have been strengthened in this study highlight the significance of the relational pedagogy which is emotionally supportive in the early childhood learning processes.

The study indicates the institutional support and professional growth programs that are sustainable in maintaining progressive, inclusive, and growth-responsive practice in Gen Z teachers. Further studies can increase the number of participants or be generational comparison studies to gain a deeper insight into the changing teaching in early childhood education.

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Statement And Declaration

The researcher declare that this manuscript is an original work and not been submitted to any other publisher. All ethical standards relevant to educational research were carefully observed throughout the conducting of the study. All the participants information was handled with confidentiality and respect. All data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Ethical Consideration

This study went through review and was approved by the DMMMSU Research Ethics Committee (REC) with a REC code of 2025-1267–Gen Z Teachers–Adviento. Participants were informed about the aims, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. They participate voluntarily, and the personal information were securely stored with confidentiality and can only be accessed by researchers.

Consent To Participate

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. All participants were

fully informed of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any academic or personal consequences.

Consent For Publication

Not Applicable.

Declaration Of Conflict Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could have influenced the conduct or outcomes of this study.

Funding Statement

The study was conducted without any specific funding from public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agencies and was self-financed by the researchers.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study were collected and analyzed by the researchers and may be shared by the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Since the study includes human subjects, access to the data will be contingent upon ethical approval and confidentiality considerations.

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