The Gen Z Learner vs. Traditional Teaching: Challenges and Adaptations

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the growing divide between traditional pedagogical methods and the distinct learning preferences of Generation Z (Gen Z) students within contemporary educational environments. The emergence of Generation Z, along with the rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology, has significantly influenced the educational system. As a result, the learning preferences of Gen Z students have changed considerably compared to those of previous generations. Gen Z learners are highly connected to digital platforms, prefer interactive learning experiences, and actively seek to integrate technology into their learning process. This transformation has created both opportunities and challenges for educators, requiring them to develop new teaching skills as an essential component of effective teaching in the modern educational landscape. Consequently, teachers must rethink conventional teaching approaches and adopt more flexible, technology-supported instructional methods.

The present study, titled "**The Gen Z Learners vs. Traditional Teaching: Challenges and Adaptations**," examines the changing dynamics between Gen Z learners and traditional teaching practices from a sociological perspective. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the role of artificial intelligence and digital tools in supporting classroom instruction, identify the professional development needs of educators in response to changing educational demands, examine the major challenges teachers face while teaching Generation Z learners, and understand how educators are adapting their teaching methods to meet the expectations and learning styles of Gen Z students.

This study adopts a quantitative research approach using the survey method to collect primary data from both teachers and students. In addition, semi-structured interviews are conducted to gain deeper insights into the research problem. Secondary data are also utilised to support the study. A total of 100 participants, comprising 50 teachers and 50 students, were selected using a random sampling method. This study was conducted in Manjeri schools and college in Malappuram district, Kerala

The findings indicate a significant gap between traditional teaching and Gen Z learning preferences, while highlighting the importance of digital technology, AI integration, continues teacher training. The study concludes that adapting traditional teaching through more flexible, interactive and technology-supported approaches can contribute to a more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environment.

Keywords: Generation Z, traditional teaching, artificial intelligence, digital tools, professional development, classroom adaptation, and educational adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a dynamic social institution that continuously changes in response to developments in society, culture, technology, and the needs of learners. The process of teaching and learning that existed in older generations has been widely increased and influenced by the rapid growth of technological advancement and changing patterns of communication and social interaction. In contemporary educational environments, classrooms consist of learners who have grown up in a highly digital and interconnected world. These big

changes have created a need to reconsider conventional approaches to teaching and learning and to examine whether traditional pedagogical practices can respond effectively to the expectations and learning preferences of the present generation.

The emergence of Generation Z has created new learning expectations, as these students are familiar with digital platforms: smartphones, social media, and online resources. As a result, many Gen Z learners prefer interactive, practical, visual, and technology-supported learning rather than depending entirely on traditional classroom methods.

At the same time, traditional teaching methods such as lectures, textbooks, note-taking, and teacher-centred instruction continue to play an important role in education. However, the difference between these conventional approaches and the learning preferences of Gen Z has created new challenges for teachers and educational institutions. Teachers are increasingly required to adapt their teaching methods, integrate digital tools, and develop new skills to engage contemporary learners effectively.

The present study, "**The Gen Z Learners vs. Traditional Teaching: Challenges and Adaptations,"** will analyse this changing relationship from a sociological perspective. This study mainly focuses on Gen Z students' learning preferences, the challenges faced by teachers, the role of AI and digital tools, and the need for professional development and adaptation in teaching practices. Examine traditional teaching practices and contemporary learning expectations and explores ways to create a more engaging, flexible, and effective educational environment.

In this research, we have conducted a survey and collected data from both Teachers and Students to understand and analyse the issues from two complementary perspectives. The study also proposes the use of semi-structured interviews and secondary sources to develop a deeper understanding of the research problem. By bringing together the experiences of learners and educators, the research attempts to identify the areas of agreement and difference between Gen Z learning preferences and existing teaching practices.

In this way, the study contributes to the broader discussion of educational transformation and the development of a more engaging, inclusive, flexible, and effective learning environment for contemporary students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study**, Rylance-Graham and Ismail (2026)** conducted a narrative synthesis on ***Generation Z and digital learning preferences***. The study explored whether Gen Z learners genuinely prefer technology-based education or whether this assumption is overstated. The review found that most Gen Z students are comfortable with digital technologies and expect interactive, flexible, and student-centred learning environments rather than traditional lecture-based teaching. However, the authors also emphasised that technology alone does not improve learning outcomes; effective teaching strategies remain essential.

Frontiers in Education (2025) have examined the integration of artificial intelligence and metacognitive strategies in teaching Generation Z learners. This study reported that AI-powered educational tools, such as personalized learning platforms, intelligent tutoring systems, and automated feedback mechanisms, can significantly improve student engagement, motivation, and academic performance. However, the researchers argued that AI should be viewed as a support system for teachers rather than a replacement for classroom instruction.

Seemiller and Grace (2017) have studied the characteristics and learning preferences of Generation Z students in higher education. Based on a study involving more than 750 students from 15 higher education institutions, the authors found that Generation Z learners differ significantly from previous generations in their expectations of teaching and learning. They prefer interactive classrooms, technology-supported instruction, collaborative learning, and immediate feedback rather than passive, lecture-based teaching. The study argues thatmany traditional teaching methods, which emphasize one-way communication and rote memorization, are less effective in engaging Generation Z learners.

Cilliers (2017), in the ***article Generation Z: Educating and Engaging the Next Generation of Students***, has examined the learning characteristics of Generation Z and their implications for higher education. The study found that Generation Z students have grown up in a technology-rich environment and therefore prefer interactive, technology-supported, and learner-centred educational experiences. Unlike traditional teaching methods, which rely heavily on lectures and passive learning, Generation Z learners respond more positively to collaborative activities, multimedia resources, classroom discussions, and immediate feedback. The author argued that educators need to move beyond conventional teacher-centred instruction by incorporating active learning strategies, digital technologies, and flexible teaching approaches that encourage student participation and critical thinking.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic approach used by a researcher to conduct a study and collect, organise, analyse and interpret data. This will give a clear understanding how the research problem is investigated and hoe reliable information is obtained from the participants.

Objective

- To evaluate the role of artificial intelligence and digital tools in supporting classroom instruction.
- To identify the professional developments needs of educators in response to changing educational demands.
- To identify the key challenges that teachers face in teaching the new generation children's.

Research Design

The study adopts a **Explorative research design** to understand and analyse the relationship between Gen Z learners and traditional teaching practices. A survey method is used to collect the primary data from both teachers and students. The quantitative method helps to find patterns in learning preferences, teaching practices, use of digital technologies, challenges faced by teachers and students, and the adaptation strategies adopted in the contemporary classrooms. The study is also supported by qualitative information obtained through semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of participants.

Study population

This mainly focuses on two groups that are directly involved in the Teaching- Learning process: **Generation Z students and teachers.** Collected the data from schools and college's in Manjeri, Malappuram. Students were included to understand their learning preferences, experiences with traditional teaching methods, use of digital learning resources, and expectations from teachers. Teachers were included to examine their experiences of teaching Gen Z learners, the challenges they encounter, their use of digital and AI- based tools, and the changes they make to their teaching practices.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, the students and the teachers are the primary respondents. The participants were selected using a **random sampling method** to understand the challenges and the adaptations that teachers and Generation Z had made.

Sample size: A total of 100 participants were selected, here the data were collected from 50 numbers of teachers and the 50 number students.

Source of Data

The study uses both **primary** and **secondary sources of data**.

Primary data were collected directly from schools and colleges in Manjeri, Malappuram, from the teachers and students through structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to collect information about learning preferences, teaching practices, technology use, AI use, classroom challenges, and adaptation strategies.

Secondary data were obtained from relevant books, journal articles, research studies, reports, and other academic sources related to Generation Z, traditional teaching, digital education, artificial intelligence, educational technology, and teacher adaptation. Secondary sources were used to provide theoretical and contextual support for the findings of the study.

Tools of data collection

A **structured questionnaire** was used as the main research method. Separate questionnaires were prepared for students and teachers to reflect their different experiences within the educational environment.

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain deeper insight into the research problem. The interviews provided an opportunity for participants to explain their experiences and opinions in greater detail. This helped complement the quantitative findings by providing contextual understanding of the challenges associated with Gen Z learners, traditional teaching, digital technology, and classroom adaptation.

Method of data collection

The present study follows a quantitative research approach using the survey method, supported by qualitative information obtained through semi structured interview.

Limitations of the study

The study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting its findings.

- The relatively limited sample size and geographical coverage may restrict the generalisation of the findings to all Gen Z learners and teachers.
- The study relies mainly on self-reported responses from students and teachers, which individual perceptions or socially desirable responses may influence.
- The study focuses primarily on participants' perceptions and does not extensively include direct classroom observations.
- The rapid development of digital technology and artificial intelligence means that learning practices and technological preferences may continue to change over time. Therefore, the findings should be understood within the specific context and period in which the study was conducted.

Analysis And Interpretation

Introduction

The major objective of the present study is to examine the changing relationship between Gen Z learners and traditional teaching practices, with particular attention to students' learning preferences, classroom experiences, use of digital technologies, and the challenges faced by teachers. The analysis also seeks to understand how educators are adapting their teaching strategies to meet the changing expectations of Gen Z learners.

The study is based on primary data collected from 50 students and 50 teachers, making a total of 100 respondents.

Separate structured questionnaires were administered to students and teachers. The students' questionnaire examined learning preferences, experiences with traditional teaching, digital resource use, classroom challenges, digital technology, artificial intelligence, teaching adaptations, and professional development.

Demographic profile of student respondents

Age group	Number	Percentage
16–18	5	10%
18–20	20	40%
20–22	20	40%
22 and above	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Table 1

The largest proportion of student respondents is in the 20-22 age group (40%), followed by those aged 18-20 (20%). Students aged 16-18 constitute 10%, while 10% are aged 22 and above. The predominance of young respondents is appropriate for this study because it examines the learning experiences and preferences of Generation Z students.

Year of study

The majority of respondents are first-year UG students (50%). School students are (30%) and first-year PG students account for (20%), respectively. The predominance of first-year UG students indicates that a large proportion of respondents have considerable experience with higher education and classroom teaching practices.

Type of institution

The majority of students, 26 respondents, are from private institutions, followed by aided institutions 9 respondents and government institutions 15 respondents. Thus, the findings are more strongly reflective of students studying in private institutions within the selected sample.

Learning preferences of Gen Z students

Preferred learning method	Number	Percentage
Classroom lectures	26	52%
Combination of different methods	8	16 %
Media/multimedia	8	16%
Online resources	3	6%
Other responses	5	10%

Table 2

The findings show that classroom lectures remain an important learning method among Gen Z students, with 52% selecting them as their preferred method. However, a considerable proportion prefers a combination of different methods, multimedia, or online resources. This indicates that Gen Z learners cannot simply be characterised as rejecting traditional teaching. Instead, they appear to value classroom teaching while also expecting variety and technological support.

Internet use for Academic purposes

Internet use is a significant part of students' academic activities. About 72% of respondents use the internet often or very often, while 16% use it sometimes. Only 12.5% use it rarely. This demonstrates that online information has become an important supplementary source of knowledge for Gen Z learners.

Commonly used digital resources

In this study, the most commonly used digital resource is Google. We got 36 responses. Social media and E-book /PDFs are also used by students for learning. This indicates that Gen Z students have access to knowledge beyond the classroom and frequently depend on digital platforms for academic information.

Interactive and technology-supported learning.

The finding indicates a general movement towards interactive and visually engaging learning. Students' open-ended responses further support this preference, frequently mentioning videos, discussions, practical activities, presentations, and technology. Thus, visual and interactive resources can be considered important components of contemporary Gen Z learning.

It also suggests that technology is not viewed merely as a source of entertainment but also as an educational resource. Digital presentations, videos, online resources, and AI-supported tools can help student's access information in different formats and may improve comprehension. However, the presence of neutral and negative responses indicates that technology alone cannot guarantee effective learning.

Experience with Traditional Teaching Methods

The student responses indicate that traditional lecture-based teaching remains common. Most respondents reported experiencing lectures sometimes or occasionally, while only a small proportion reported that lectures are always used.

These findings demonstrate that traditional teaching continues to occupy an important position in the classroom. However, students' later responses indicate that they prefer traditional teaching when it is accompanied by interactions, examples, technology, or practical activities. Therefore, the issue is not the complete disappearance of lectures but the need to make lectures more engaging.

Ability to maintain concentration during long lectures

A considerable proportion of students expressed difficulty maintaining concentration during lengthy classroom lectures, while many respondents selected the neutral category.

But the findings suggest that prolonged lecture-based instruction may create difficulties in sustaining students' attention. This is particularly important because several respondents

identified short attention spans and difficulty maintaining concentration as challenges in their learning. The findings therefore indicate the importance of shorter, more engaging and participatory learning.

Major Limitation of Traditional Teaching

Here, in the analysis, the most repeated answer was limited use of technology. Students also mentioned the lack of interaction and practical learning. This demonstrates that students' dissatisfaction is primarily related to passive teaching practices rather than to classroom teaching itself. They expect traditional classroom instruction to become more interactive, practical, and technologically supported.

Challenges Experienced by Gen Z Students

The findings indicate that Gen Z learners face challenges in both traditional and digital environments. Lengthy reading materials and passive teaching can make concentration difficult, while the large amount of information available online can lead to information

overload. Digital platforms, therefore, have a dual impact: they provide educational opportunities while also creating distraction and difficulty in managing attention.

Students' Perceptions of the Difference between Their Learning Style and Traditional Teaching

The open-ended responses indicate that the major difference is not simply between

technology and non-technology. Instead, it is between active participation and passive reception of knowledge. Learners want to discuss, question, explore, participate, and

connect theoretical knowledge with real-life situations. Traditional teaching becomes less attractive when students are expected only to listen and reproduce information. Most of the recommendations demonstrate a strong preference for pedagogical adaptation. Students are asking for technology to replace teachers. Rather, they expect technology and interactive

methods to strengthen classroom teaching. The responses, therefore, support the development of a blended and student-centred learning environment.

Analysis of Teacher Respondents

The diversity of teaching experience provides perspectives from both relatively new and experienced educators. This is important because teachers with different levels of experience may have different levels of familiarity with digital technology and different approaches to teaching Gen Z learners. However, we took 50 samples from teachers; it includes high school and postgraduate teachers, who form the largest portion of the sample. Here, most of the teachers, around 40% of them, reported that they currently teach Gen Z students, while a small number, like 7% of them, reported doing so partly, and 3% of them reported not currently.

Teachers' Perceptions of Gen Z Learning Behaviour

Here in this study, the findings suggest that teachers do not have a completely uniform perception of Gen Z attention. Individual differences and classroom contexts may influence students' ability to concentrate. Nevertheless, several teachers identified short attention spans as a major classroom challenge. Here, the majority of 49%, teachers agreed or strongly agreed that Gen Z students prefer interactive and activity-based learning over traditional lectures.

Teachers' perceptions of preferred learning methods

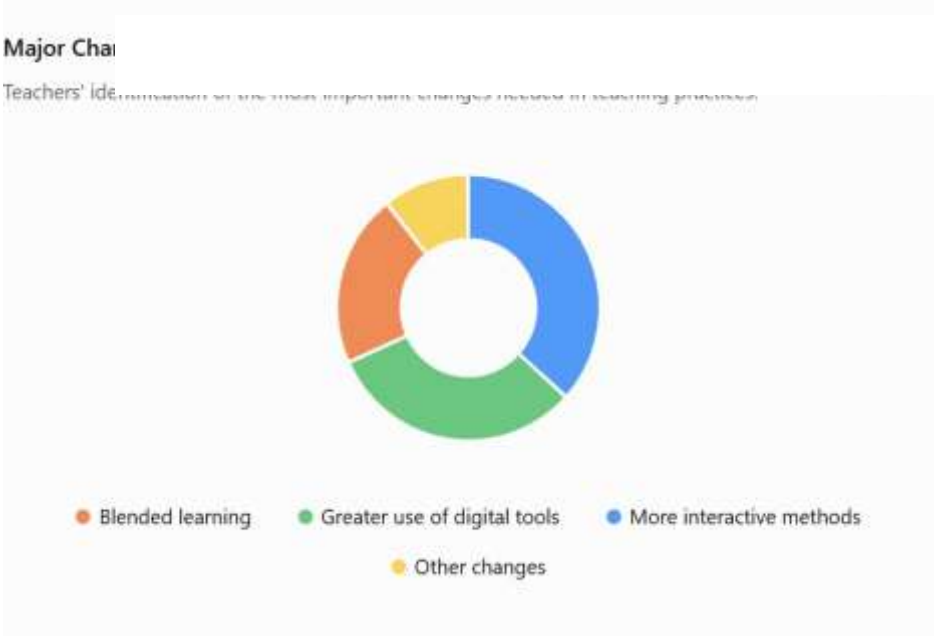
Here in this study, the teachers recognise that Gen Z learners benefit from learning experiences that involve participation, visual material, and practical application. This indicates a clear movement away from exclusive dependence on lecture-based instruction. Also, Gen Z learners want quick access to information and communication. Consequently, they may expect quicker responses and feedback in educational contexts as well. This creates a need for teachers to explore efficient feedback mechanisms without compromising the quality of assessment.

Major Challenges Faced by Teachers

In this study, excessive smartphone use emerges as an important concern. Teachers must manage a classroom where the same device can function both as an educational resource and as a source of distraction. Different learning expectations and short attention spans further increase the need for flexible classroom management and

engagement strategies.

It also suggests that traditional teaching remains useful but may not be sufficient when used in isolation. The teacher responses indicate that long lectures, textbook-based instruction and note-taking can reduce student engagement. Therefore, traditional methods may need to be



Teachers identified three major areas of change.

- More interactive teaching methods
- Greater use of digital tools
- Blended learning

Interactive teaching methods were the most frequently identified change. This closely corresponds with students' responses. Both groups therefore recognise the importance of moving from passive knowledge transmission towards active participation and engagement

Situations where traditional teaching was ineffective.

Here, in the open-ended 35.5% responses, particularly the teachers had responded that the long lectures, textbook-oriented classes, continuous note-taking, and lack of interactions had made the traditional methods of learning less effective. Some teachers explained that students became distracted during long lectures, but they had become engaged when teachers introduced discussions, visuals, digital resources, and practical activities.

FINDINGS

- The study found that Gen Z students prefer interactive, practical, visual, and technology-supported learning, although classroom lectures continue to be valued by many students.
- Students reported that long lectures, textbook-based learning, limited interaction, and lack of practical learning can reduce concentration and classroom engagement.
- Both the teachers and students recognised that digital tools can improve classroom engagement and understanding. At the same time, excessive use of smartphones and social media can also create distractions

and reduce classroom engagement.

- Teachers observed that Gen Z students mostly prefer interactive and activity-based learning, with practical activities, multimedia, digital learning and blended learning considered effective approaches.
- The study found that Gen Z does not necessarily reject traditional teaching methods, but they may become less effective when used mainly through lengthy lectures, note-taking, and passive learning.
- Teachers reported several challenges in teaching Gen Z learners, particularly excessive smartphone use, short attention spans, different learning expectations, etc
- Artificial intelligence was generally viewed positively by teachers as a useful educational support tool. However, teachers also identified a strong need for additional training in AI and digital technologies
- Teachers identified digital teaching skills, AI-based educational tools, classroom management, student engagement, and modern assessment as very important for professional development

Overall, the study demonstrates a growing need for flexible, student-centred and technology-supported teaching practices that respond to the changing learning preferences of Gen Z while maintaining meaningful teacher-student interaction

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the changing relationship between Generation Z learners and traditional teaching practices, with particular attention to learning preferences, digital technology, artificial intelligence, teachers' challenges, and classroom adaptation. The findings show that Gen Z students continue to value classroom teaching but increasingly expect learning to be interactive, practical, flexible, visual, and supported by technology.

Both students and teachers identified long lectures, textbook-based instruction, limited interaction, and passive learning as important challenges.

Digital tools, multimedia resources, AI, and blended learning were viewed as useful for improving engagement and understanding.

The study further highlights the need for teachers to adapt their teaching strategies according to changing learners' expectations. Teachers expressed the importance of interactive methods, digital integration, practical activities, and continuous professional development, particularly in AI and digital teaching skills.

Overall, the study concludes that a balanced and blended model combining traditional pedagogy with digital innovation, active participation, and meaningful teacher-student interaction can create more engaging, inclusive, flexible, and effective learning environments for Gen Z learners.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, educational institutions should encourage teachers to adopt more interactive, practical, student-centred, technology-supported teaching methods. Traditional lectures can be combined with videos, presentations, discussions, practical activities, quizzes, and real-life examples to improve students' engagement. Teachers should receive regular professional development and training in digital teaching skills and artificial intelligence tools so that technology can be used effectively and responsibly.

Institutions should promote blended and flexible learning approaches that combine the strengths of traditional teaching with digital resources. Teachers should encourage active participation, critical thinking, collaboration, etc. Finally, educational institutions should provide adequate digital infrastructure and continuous support to

teachers so that they can respond effectively to the changing learning preferences of Gen Z students.



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