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ACADEMIC CHALLENGES WITH REIMAGING EDUCATION STRUCTURE: THE Z-GENERATION DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

Generation Z, sometimes referred to as the iGeneration comprises of people born from 1996 to 2011 is the focus of the higher education landscape and universities must be attentive to the changes to be able to stay in business. This generation has its own preferences in deciding how they learn and study. However, little work has been done by academicians to research these students' perceptions on the current teaching styles of the lecturers that have blended technology into the classroom. This study investigates Generation Z college students' challenges in adapting to the educators teaching style and the challenges faced by educators in using the tools effectively to encourage inquisitive learning. Public university lecturers and students are the targeted participants. Students will be surveyed in business courses and interviews of faculty will follow through.

Keywords: Z-Generation, blended learning, flexible education

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has made quite an impact in transforming its higher education system to a new paradigm. Under the slogan of Redesigning Higher Education, the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education has delineated a systematic approach that is designed to produce dynamic graduates who are favourably versatile and ready for today's volatile future. The Ministry of Higher Education should be applauded for its effort in reimagine the Malaysian education system.

For the past few years, Malaysia had taken some well-thought steps in preparing for the Z-Generation who are seen as both seamlessly digital and yet humanly and socially engaged. This Z-Generation or the iGeneration who are born between 1996 and 2011 will begin to flood the workplace by the end of this decade. Tulgan (2013) commented that the Z-Generation presents profound challenges to the HR practitioners and the academics. Currently, in Malaysia, the Z-Generation rules 9.06 million of the population which is about 29.7% of the total population.

In Malaysia the Z-Generation are known to have these eight characteristics (HRinASIA, 2015). Firstly they are more comfortable with people behind the scenes and popularity on social media is a must in life. Secondly, mobile phone is their lifeline. This generation are very cynical about the information they receive online. They are the most global and technologically literate generation who think in hyperlinks, multi-task and absorb information from multiple sources (Meera & Hameed, 2016). They also believe strongly on online privacy. Remarkably, this generation care about their environment, freedom of speech and safety where they feel the needs to be involved. They are confident knowledgably and the most formally educated generation in history and are projected to stay in education for longer than ever (McCrindle, 2010). Nevertheless this generation also has its drawbacks. This Z-Generation suffers in handling stress and disappointments. To put it differently, this generation is prone to perpetual child syndrome (HRinASIA, 2015). Living in this era of fast changing technology, they have the desire to learn and are thirsty for online contents especially video contents. Research has also shown that this Z-

Generation entrepreneurial spirit exceeds that of the Millennials generation as they are more global in their interaction with others. That is to say, they welcome diversity.

The newly designed Just-in Time curriculums and the flexible education arrangement by the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education aims to fulfil the Z-Generation curiosity and learning experiences via real-life work experiences beyond the varsity campuses are examples of organic learning experience. Students are able to enhance their personal development and competencies by taking a year gap from their studies by joining the industries, undertaking voluntarism or travel the world to expand their learning experience progressively. With the tremendous forces of competition flooding our shore and the world is leading towards an innovation-led economy, the Public Universities educators need to transform the teaching style to fit the Z-Generation needs which are contents seekers, diversity-oriented and virtually interactive. In the Malaysian context, the Public Universities academics should also adapt to the digital era and address the important needs of the Z-Generation. The question is: are the Public Universities academics in Malaysia using the tools effectively to encourage the learners to be an inquisitive learner? Are we fully prepared to lead the experiential learning processes that meet the Z-Generation expectation? Are we fully knowledgeable in applying best practices when creating cooperative learning activities? Are the learners receptive to our teaching style?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Z- Generation Characteristics and Teaching with Technology

While research is limited on this generation, the Z-Generation is also known with many other names such as the Gen-V (for virtual), Gen-C (for community or content), the Silent Generation, the iGeneration (for internet) or the Google Generation, nonetheless they share a common denominator which is the information and communication technologies (ICTs). The Z-Generation are those born between 1995 and 2012 (Schroer, 2008). They are technology savvy, multi-taskers, socially open in the use of technology, quick and impulsive, interactive and resilient. Apparently, they prefer to communicate through images, icons and symbols rather than texts. They are frequent bloggers, or “Vloggers” (video bloggers) (Benhamou, 2015) and enjoy digital publishing (Lyon, 2010). They are very transparent online, and they prefer a 2-way conversation when online. They are open-minded and adaptable (Bernstein, 2015). They are task driven and move from one task to another and place more value on speed than accuracy (Geck, 2007; Hoffman, 2003; Posnick-Goodwin, 2010; Bennett, 2008). The Z-Generation shares a few similar values as the X-Generation because their parents are from the X-Generation. The Z-Generation are more likely to request for parental guidance with their problems instead of somebody else. They see the world in black and white and no grey areas compared to the previous generation (Wurpel, 2011). This generation also strongly believes trust is earned and not given. To them diversity is not just about race, age, gender but include personal differences. Savitt (2011) notices that the Z-Generation are go-getters and trendsetters.

This is a generation that has grown up during the period of “volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity”. This generation wants to co-create, and be involved in their activities but startlingly has an attention span of 8 seconds (Micoleta, 2012). They prefer integration of practical experiences within their majors (StatsWatch, 2015). They also experience FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), plan to get educated and start a career earlier but will be “school hackers” (Elmore, 2014). The Z-Generation may also be technologically savvy for their age but they are also members of the age groups that have seen less outdoor activity, more sedentary life styles, and corresponding health issues. Furthermore, due to the rapid movement of technologic communication, they expect instant-gratification (Crappell, 2013; Benhamou, 2015). As a result of the Z-Generation’s early association to the social media there is a genuine concern that they may not perform well in areas such as public speaking, which is an essential business skill set. This is an important finding for educators.

As mentioned earlier, the Z-generation consider themselves as independent, impulsive, stubborn and pragmatic. They speak using acronyms and spend an average of three hours per day on the internet. This is another vital information for educators. Apparently they enjoy learning through videos and YouTube. They spend an average 3 hours a day on the internet. The Z-Generation apparently learn by doing. In the era of K-economy and K-technology the world economy pays for how creatively the current knowledge is used, extrapolate the knowledge and apply the new information in another context. Skills such as critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and collaboration are at an increasing premium. Nevertheless, the school and varsities system in Malaysia is very examination and text book centric and students have been

wired to excel academically. This at times limit the practise of creativity. So the burning question is: are these Z-Generation adapting well to the educators teaching style enable them to contribute back to the economy with their creativity and innovative ways? How interactive are our teaching style?

Problem Statement

As expounded earlier, the key objectives of this conceptual paper is to answers three important questions related to the challenges of integrating technology in meeting the Z-Generation learning style.

Specifically the objectives of the study are to:

- (1) What are the challenges face by educators in educating the Z-Generation?
- (2) What are the challenges face by educators in using the tools effectively to encourage inquisitive learner?
- (3) What are the challenges face by the Z-Generation in adapting to the educators teaching style?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims at assessing the challenges faced by the Malaysian Public Universities educator in using technology in educating the Z-Generation. This paper is a qualitative exploratory research to gain an insight into the underlying challenges, opinions and motivations of engaging technology in this new re-emerging education system. Individual interviews will be engaged. The population to be studied are public universities lecturers and students who have started using technology in their teaching for at least one year. The sample will come from both the lecturers and students in Malaysia and will include lecturers aged 27–60. Participants will be selected with the help of personnel from the universities and the willingness of lecturers to participate in the study. The researcher will construct a survey designed to answer the research question and also conduct personal interviews to triangulate the findings. A panel of experts in the field will validate the instruments. A pilot study will be used to test for reliability.

CONCLUSION

The crucial question is what do the Z-Generation wants from learning technology? Are we the educators providing enough interaction or interactivity with the use of a computer, within their peers or via ourselves the educators? Traditional lectures may not be fulfilling the learning inquisitiveness of the Z-Generation today and the online courses do not work well with them. As technology in the classroom evolves the social and interactive component will be more demanding by the students.

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