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Review Article
Role of Nursing Faculty

Understanding Generation Z Nursing Students and Role of Nursing Faculty and Educators: A Narrative Review

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The nursing education landscape is undergoing a significant transformation due to generational shifts. A widening gap exists between Generation Y educators and Generation Z and Alpha students, impacting teaching methodologies and curriculum design. Students' readily available access to online information contrasts sharply with educators' past experiences of in-depth research. This necessitates a paradigm shift in teaching approaches to accommodate the unique learning styles and technological proficiency of younger generations. Understanding the sociocultural influences shaping Gen Z students' worldviews, and embracing technology in the classroom, are crucial for effective nursing education and preparing the future nursing workforce. Faculty development focusing on technology integration is essential to bridge the generational divide and ensure successful student learning.

Keywords: Nursing education, generation Z, teaching methods, generation gaps, learning styles, challenges, nursing faculty, nurse educator

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Introduction

The dynamics of time have undergone a profound transformation, marked by a shift in generations. These changes affect every aspect of our lives, highlighting the need to adapt to the evolving landscape of nursing education. It's not just about adjusting the curriculum; it's also crucial to understand the students of today, who have different beliefs and values compared to previous generations. Recognizing this necessity emphasizes the importance of recognizing and adapting to their unique qualities. Nowadays, most of us, being educators experience that we are being challenged by nursing students based on what they have found on the internet.

They can get almost all the answers via an online search, without any effort. On the other hand, when we look at ourselves, we struggle deep down into a rabbit hole., which these learners don't want to do. Incidences like this state that there is a significant generational gap exists between educators and students. The upbringing and experiences of Generation Y educators differ markedly from those of Generation Z and the emerging Generation Alpha learners. To bridge this gap, Generation Y educators must remain aware of the latest trends and innovations. This necessitates a paradigm shift in teaching methodologies and a profound understanding of these younger generations' unique characteristics and learning styles.

There is insufficient comprehension regarding the distinct attributes of contemporary nursing students. To teach Gen Z students, it is important to examine the sociocultural influences that shaped their worlview [1]. According to Cheryl Williams, Nursing faculty may need to be flexible with course and curriculum planning. Because many nursing faculty are older and more likely to be of Generation X or older Generation Y, so, generational differences in nursing education will be apparent, particularly as they relate to the use of technology. Gen Z students have been called technology savants, constantly adapting to new technology and expecting their teachers to do the same. This could potentially be a problem if nursing faculty have not yet embraced technology in the classroom or if nursing school/college administrators have not updated and offered faculty development about learning technology [1].

Therefore, it's essential for us, as nursing faculty members, to gain a thorough understanding of the group we are teaching. They will become the mainstay of the nursing workforce in the near future, so it is very crucial to learn about them.

Classification of generation

Generation is usually classified by birth year which reflects the shared experiences, values, and thoughts shaped by historical events and technological advancements. Each generation possesses distinct features influencing their behaviors, perspectives and preferences in areas like communication, work learning patterns etc. We are living in the Generation Alpha era, which encompasses individuals born between 2010 and 2024, who are people of the 21st century, deeply rooted in technologies and digital culture. Following is the categorization of other generations with their features: -

Generation	Born year range	Dominant behavioral characteristics
Traditionalist	1900 – 1945	Loyal and discipline
Baby boomers	1946 – 1964	Responsible, strong work ethics
Generation X	1965 – 1980	Independent thinkers, efficient
Generation Y	1981 – 1994	More social, confident, less independent
Generation Z	1995 – 2012	Poor communication skills, extensively engaged in technology

Source: MacKenzie, & McGuire,(2016), Glass, (2007) and Wiedmer (2015)

Features/attributes of Generation Z learners

People born between the years 1995 and 2012 are known as Generation Z iGen or centennials. This is the latest generation of students to enrol in nursing education. This generation was birth in a society enveloped by technological embrace. On the other hand, most of the nursing faculty or educator belongs to Generation X and Generation Y. Raised in a world of instant gratification, generation Z often demands immediate results and pre-packaged knowledge, shaped by their constant interaction with technology. For any query, they are used to refer to Google/ Youtube and so on and, go for shortcut ways to get the answers of anything. These students need a lot of reinforcement as they are not used to think critically through situations. Generation Z students have shorter attention spans than previous generations of students, in that, the average Generation Z student attention span is 8 seconds [2].

GenZ learn by observation and practice. They do not want lectures and prefer doing them over memorizing. GenZers learn by solving real-world problems. Communication with Gen Z students may also be different. Gen Z students do not engage in long conversations, communicating instead in, short bits and pieces [1]. Their preferred style of communication is texting, Twitter, Snapchat etc. According to a growing body of literature, Generation Z tends to be less resilient, less mentally tough and suffers from higher levels of anxiety and depression [3]. This can be because of the unrealistic comparison of themselves with others.

Learning styles and activities

Generation Z learners expect technology instead of books as there is a decline in reading habits of not more than 30 minutes a day and they prefer storytelling to reading books. They prefer learning independently via online and they want to learn from passionate educators who maintain content expertise and do enthusiastic teaching, keeping them involved throughout. A study done by Koh and colleagues, it was found that breaking a typical 1-hour of lecture into three or four short lectures, followed by a practical exercise, improved learning outcomes, which is very similar to that of consuming small chunks of information in online platforms as many Generation Z students do. Bowen and Mandernach believe that student engagement can be defined in four related ways: (1) engagement with learning process through participation activities (active learning), (2) experienced-based or object-focused learning (experiential learning), (3) focus on real world context of study (multidisciplinary learning), and (4) engagement with human condition or basics of human existence (service learning)[2]. Behavioral aspects include course involvement, attendance, and other active learning responses. Cognitive aspects are represented by mental effort students put into learning, including amount of work they do in course and how they deal with course challenges. Emotional or affective aspects of engagement relate to emotional connection to course experience, amount of investment made in learning, and student's sense of interest and enjoyment in experience. Students are most deeply engaged in courses when educators individualize and personalize materials as much as possible and make connections to student life [2].

Experiential learning in the classroom with the help of real-life scenarios, video case studies, and clinical simulations with hands-on facilities will promote the application of the learned content by Generation Z students.

Generation Z Nursing Students Vs Nurse Educators

Qualities	Nursing Students of GenZ	Nurse Educators/Faculty(Generation- X or old Generation -Y)
Preferred learning approach	Digitalized, prefer interactive, visual learning, example videos, applications, online resources, and PowerPoint presentations.	Prefers traditional methods like textbooks, books, notes, lectures and PowerPoint presentations
Technology adaptation	Extremely comfortable, prefer self-paced e-learning modules	Adapted to technology but may still prefer structured, in-person learning approaches
Practical experience approach	Strong preference for hands-on, experiential learning	Balanced approach between the theoretical and practical aspects
Attention span	Short attention span, prefer compact information	More comfortable with extended, in-depth discussions and lectures
Communication techniques	Prefer texting, instant messaging and more use of social media	Prefer e-mails, formal communication and in-person meetings
Feedback expectation	Expect immediate feedback and validation	Comfortable with scheduled feedback sessions or periodic evaluations
Decorum or etiquette	Informal and casual	More formal and professional
Work habits	Prefer flexibility and value well-being	Values discipline, and hierarchy and follows strong work ethics
Tools for learning	Use YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, ChatGPT etc for educational purposes	Rely on professional journals, books and institutional resources
Mental health concerns	Open about mental health struggles and expects support	Are more reserved and tend to focus on resilience
Teamwork	Prefer collaborative & team-based approaches,	Comfortable with individual as well as teamwork, but rely on structured leadership.
Adaptability to Embrace Technology in Nursing	Very quick to embrace new technologies and methods.	Welcomes change but requires time to adapt
Perception of Nursing	View as a dynamic, Tech-enabled profession	As a traditional patient–centred vocation

Practical exercises and assigned group activities can prove to be effective for them, as they value peer and educator relationships. Educators can also maintain engagement through question-and-answer sessions.

Challenges faced by the nurse educators/ faculties

The generational gap between the educator and learner is the main cause of the challenges faced today. Understanding our learners and keeping our educators updated can help to overcome the challenges faced.

- Traditional teaching models, lecture methods, and theory-based methods may not align with the learner's need for interactive and visual learning.
- Technology integration is another challenge faced. Educators may face challenges in keeping up with the latest tech- tools and platforms that may appeal to learner Generations.
- Screen time balancing issues are. Over-reliance on digital tools might affect health and other issues like decreased interpersonal communication skills.

Strategies to overcome the challenges

First of all, we need to incorporate advanced technologies in our teaching-learning activities, for which educators need to keep themselves updated with in-service programmes etc. This will promote the use of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality for simulation-based learning in clinical scenarios. Incorporating AI-driven adaptive learning platforms for personalised education and leveraging mobile apps for quick access to clinical guidelines and resources can also be helpful.

Secondly, educators must focus on experiential learning by increasing the use of case studies, role - plays and peer-le discussions. This will foster practical skills. Early exposure to clinical environments/ settings can be done through simulation labs and internships.

Lastly, gamification techniques can be " The Game changer". Educators can introduce nursing quizzes, challenges or scenario-based questionnaires to bombard the learner's critical thinking abilities. This will not only keep the learner involved but will encourage active participation.

Useful Tools for Generation Z to Enhance Teaching Learning Activities

There are various teaching-learning tools available for educators as well as learners like learning tools, communication and collaboration platforms, tools for student engagement and feedback, mental health well-being programs etc.

- SimCapture and Laerdal SimMan: SIM-Capture is a simulation tool provided by Leardal Medical that, when integrated into a Leardal simulation system, records all student actions in simulated scenarios to provide detailed, real-time feedback regarding the student's performance. The integration of this technology may be a key tool for nursing faculty as a means of accurately recording student's clinical performance in simulation to inform the subsequent debriefing process to maximize student learning in the simulation environment [4].
- Kahoot!: With the Kahoot application, online exams, surveys, and discussions can be created.Quizzes can be made by writing questions and answers one by one (by specifying the correct answer) on the account created after becoming a member. Also, photos or videos can be added to the questions. In the Kahoot application, nurses prepare the questions before the lesson. One of the main advantages of Kahoot, which is one of the "Game-Based Learning", is the formation of a certain competitive environment among the students, providing a graded score according to the number of correct answers and response time [5].
- HoloAnatomy and Anatomy 4D: the mixed reality platform HoloAnatomy represents an effective and time-efficient modality to learn anatomy when compared to traditional cadaveric dissection. HoloAnatomy may decrease the time necessary for anatomy didactics without sacrificing student understanding of the material [6].
- Moodle or Canvas: MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) is a web-based open-source LMS, developed by Martin Dougiamas at Curtin University in Western Australia. MOODLE is widely accepted and adopted as it helps teachers create high-quality online study materials.

- It is one of the most widely used and easiest-to-use open-source e-learning platforms in higher education. It allows the integration of a wide range of resources, from chats and forums to online booklet, a variety of questions, exercises and lecture notes, in addition to multimedia resources such as graphics, video or audio, PowerPoint, and Flash-based applications [7].
- Padlet: Padlet is a digital tool that can be used like a bulletin board, which can provide space for collaboration between students, lecturers and colleagues. However, it can also be used by a single user. Padlet is multimedia that is adapted so that it can be used for the integration of text, images, video, sound and other elements including web pages, and there are several different board formats and backgrounds that you can choose from https://padlet.com. Padlet can be created by anyone almost without effort. For example, lecturers can create a Padlet for their teaching and students can create one based on their own needs or to collaborate [8].
- Mentimeter: Mentimeter, found athttps://www.mentimeter.com, provides an integrated, cloud-based system to present course content and engage students with interactive questions, word clouds, live polling, quizzes, and short surveys [9].
- Nearpod: this tool helps to create interactive lessons based on real-world applications
- Edpuzzle: Introducing Edpuzzle to students before their lab sessions helped increase student learning in biochemistry courses as reported in a study [10]. This application helps students maximize their learning outcomes while giving teachers an insight into the areas that students perceive as difficult.
- Case Study Generator: This tool helps in the generation/development the scenarios for practical discussion.

Similarly, a plethora of innovative applications are available online that are designed to make teaching engaging and sustain interest over extended periods. Notable examples include Classcraft, Pear Deck, Headspace or Clam, Moodkit, SHE, ePals, UpToDate, NCSBN learning extension, Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams or Slack, zSpace, Coursera and EdApp, Knowji and Quizlet.

These tools offer dynamic, interactive, and versatile solutions to enhance the learning experience for both educators and students.

Key reminders

- A facilitative learning environment encourages learners to listen to the expertise of educators, as well as independently seek and discuss answers that enhance learning objectives.
- Generation Z students want to learn from passionate educators. Instructors can achieve passion in several ways, and it begins with individuals who maintain content expertise. Passion and expertise result in enthusiastic teaching.
- Delivering small segments of content.
- Educators also can maintain engagement via question-and-answer sessions. Present a question and promote discussion before revealing the correct answer.

Conclusion

As previously stated, Gen Z students demonstrate significant differences in their learning engagement. This suggests that teaching methods have a significant impact on variation in student involvement. In particular, authoritative teaching styles tend to result in lower levels of student engagement than more facilitative or delegative techniques, which generate higher levels of engagement. Nursing faculty need to foster engagement through use of strategies that capture student interest and encourage active participation. These findings have significant consequences for educational practice and policy. Encourage use of student-centred teaching techniques, such as facilitator or delegator approaches, to increase student involvement and improve overall academic performance. This demands providing educators with professional development opportunities so that they can learn and effectively execute these techniques. Thus, understanding impact of teaching styles on student/learner engagement might result in more dynamic and inclusive learning environments. By supporting initiatives that promote flexible teaching strategies and continuous faculty development training, policymakers can contribute to creating educational frameworks that optimize student engagement and foster meaningful learning experiences.

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