



Phenomenology of Lived Experiences of Teachers and School Managers in Relation to Generation Z

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Abstract

The phenomenology of lived experiences of teachers and managers in relation to the Z generation offers valuable insights into the dynamics of contemporary education. This study explores the phenomenology of lived experiences of teachers and school managers within the context of Generation Z in Sanandaj, Iran. Through qualitative methods, the research examines the unique challenges and perceptions that these educators face, highlighting the cultural and social dynamics that influence their professional lives. Utilizing in-depth interviews with 24 participants, including 15 teachers and 9 school managers, the study reveals critical themes related to job stress, behavior management, and the impact of societal expectations. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of educational practices in a localized context, shedding light on the implications for policy and training.

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Introduction:

Generation Z, also known as the Z generation, is the cohort of individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s. The concept of generation refers to an age group or a set of people who were born in approximately the same time period and share common characteristics, including generational awareness, behaviors, and relatively similar age experiences (Nagy & Kölcsay, 2017). The generation gap occurs when social changes occur with great acceleration, and generations are distinguished in terms of social-historical awareness (Farasatkah, 2016). This generation is characterized by their digital nativity, diverse cultural backgrounds, and unique perspectives on work and education. In other words, this generation is characterized by its fluency in digital communication, reliance on social media, and preference for interactive learning experiences. As noted by Khosravi (2021), educators are faced with the challenge of integrating technology into their teaching practices while ensuring that students develop critical thinking skills.

It is the focal point of further studies on the "Alpha" and "Z" generations. Most of Generation Z are now in high school and university. The population that now constitutes 32% of the world's population, with about two and a half billion people, who were born between 1995 and the mid-2010s, is called Generation Z, who are currently in their teens and young adults. A generation that today, some in universities and some in schools are under the aristocracy of school education and the higher education system (Vahedi, 2022). This generation, because they were born in the world of information and the Internet, is known as Internet children, the digital generation, or the dot-com generation (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).

The educational landscape in Iran, particularly in regions such as Sanandaj, is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. This research focuses on the lived experiences of teachers and school managers, particularly in relation to the emerging Generation G—characterized by a globalized perspective and reliance on digital technologies. As noted by Khosravi (2021), educators in Iran grapple with a dual challenge: maintaining traditional pedagogical methods while adapting to the rapid technological advancements that define contemporary student engagement.

In this comparative essay, we explore the phenomenology of lived experiences of teachers and managers in relation to the Z generation. By examining the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of both educators and employers towards this generation, we aim to identify commonalities and disparities in their experiences.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals and how they make sense of the world around them. In the context of education, phenomenology can be used to explore the experiences of teachers and managers in relation to the Z generation, also known as Gen Z. Gen Z is the generation that follows the Millennials and is typically defined as those born between 1995 and 2010. This essay will delve into the phenomenology of lived experiences of teachers and managers in relation to the Z generation, exploring their perceptions, challenges, and interactions in the educational setting.

The studies and research carried out in the field of Generation Z indicate that more attention has been paid to the psychological, lifestyle, and emotional characteristics of this generation (Nouri, 2021), and less attention has been paid to their demands and needs in educational environments. Based on extensive studies (2016; 2017; 2019) by Seemiller, all the needs and preferences of generation z should be considered in a more comprehensive way in the school field. In this arena, the conflicts and differences of the new generation with managers, teachers, and even their parents with Generation Z regarding school, and deep differences and lack of alignment with educational centers, on the other hand, adapting educational strategies and content to the tastes and preferences of Generation Z, show the importance and necessity. Recognizing the needs of generation z in educational environments, which is the center of their growth, development and competence, it seems that the role and function of schools should be aligned with this generational group in all fields (Seemiller & Grace, 2019; Seemiller & et al, 2019) and because The most important member of every school is the principal, and any change should start from school principals, so the first step is to focus on school principals and their tools, i.e. their management and leadership.

Recent studies have also emphasized the importance of understanding the cultural context in which education occurs. For instance, Ghorbakhani and Salehi (2017) explored the characteristics of

successful virtual education teachers in Iran, revealing that cultural factors significantly influence teaching effectiveness. Similarly, research by Najafi (2020) indicates that blended learning methods can be particularly effective in Iranian classrooms when aligned with local educational needs.

A review of the research conducted in the field of managers also indicates the fact that, unfortunately, the management and leadership of new generations such as Alpha and Z have not been paid much attention, and in the research conducted in the field of competency models required by secondary school managers (Gohari Moghaddam, Shariatmadari, & Khorshidi, 2021; Abaspor, 2020) and the factors affecting the new generation have not been considered in the evaluation of managers' performance indicators (Kohi Esfahani, 2023; Khatir & Haghghi, 2020; Sarchahani & et al, 2018) The use of managers in schools (Zare & et al, 2019; Seemiller & et al, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020; Demir, 2021) also indicates the ineffectiveness of managers in the field of leading students of the next generation and their dissatisfaction (Ahmadifar, 2024).

Moreover, the role of technology in education has been a focal point of research, with studies by Alikhani and Alikhani (2020) demonstrating that the integration of technology can enhance learning outcomes, provided that teachers receive adequate training. The phenomenon of job stress among educators has been extensively documented, with findings from Rezaei et al. (2022) showing that inadequate resources and support systems contribute to high levels of burnout among teachers in Iran.

In light of these challenges, this study seeks to fill the gap by providing insights into how school managers and teachers navigate these complexities, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of educational practices in the region. The findings will not only highlight the lived experiences of educators but also inform policy recommendations aimed at improving educational outcomes in Sanandaj.

So the primary objectives of this study are:

- To explore the lived experiences of teachers and school managers in Sanandaj regarding their interactions with Generation G.

- To identify the challenges these educators face in adapting to the educational needs of a digitally savvy generation.
- To examine the role of cultural and socio-economic factors in shaping educational practices in the region.
- To provide recommendations for policy and professional development that can enhance educational outcomes.

Methodology:

In order to explore the phenomenology of lived experiences of teachers and managers in relation to the Z generation, qualitative research methods will be employed. This will involve conducting interviews and observations with teachers and managers who work with Gen Z students in different educational settings. The data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in their experiences.

The potential interviewees of this research were 10 principals and 15 teachers of first and second secondary schools in Sanandaj city in the academic year 1402-1403, who were selected using theoretical saturation sampling. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured and individual manner at the workplace. The interviews were face-to-face and in-depth, with 65 to 75 minutes of reviewer questions; Sometimes the interviews were repeated in order to share the preliminary findings, complete, modify, and adjust the data. The participants were asked about their experiences, their observations of examples and strategies, inhibiting factors and problems, and possible consequences of the leadership competency process. The process of all the interviews was recorded and then implemented.

The interview focused on the following topics.

- What is your perception of the competence of managers in managing Generation Z students?
- How is the phenomenon of competence formed in these schools?
- Why do you find merit and participation in merit programs of Generation Z useful?

- What are the obstacles and challenges facing the competency of Generation Z?
- What methods have been used to carry out the merit programs of these schools?
- What consequences have merit programs had for you?
- During the process of managerial competence, what factors have influenced the quality of the process?

Discussion:

The analysis followed a systematic coding process using MAXQDA software. The steps involved in the coding process were as follows:

Transcription: All interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in capturing participants' voices.

Initial Coding: Open coding was conducted to identify significant statements and phrases that reflected the participants' experiences. This involved highlighting key phrases and assigning preliminary codes.

Axial Coding: After initial coding, axial coding was employed to connect codes and identify relationships between them. For instance, codes related to "digital engagement" were linked to "adaptation challenges" to illustrate how one influenced the other.

Thematic Analysis: Finally, themes were developed from the codes, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of educators. Themes such as "navigating digital landscapes" and "bridging communication gaps" emerged as central to the participants' narratives.

Validation: To enhance the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted, where participants reviewed the themes and interpretations to ensure they accurately represented their experiences.

Table 1: The final framework of comprehensive, organizing, and basic topics identified for the competency model of leaders in the management of Generation Z by school principals

Basic themes	Organizing themes	Comprehensive themes
not being satisfied with the status quo, learning from the experiences of others and transferring one's learning to others (knowledge transfer), effective and creative problem solving using collective wisdom, aligning with new developments, and preferring gradual changes over sudden changes.	Continuous improvement	Causal factors
Evolution in the philosophy of education, evolution in the high goals of education in the primary period, and new findings in the field of educational management.	Evolution in knowledge	
Formulating an operational budget for the implementation of programs, providing the necessary material and moral rewards and incentives, providing suitable amenities, considering the appropriate place and time for the implementation of programs, and paying managers' fees based on competence and managerial ability.	Financial management	
The capacity to make changes in the organization, commitment to the development of human resources capabilities, forming working groups, and providing the basis for employee participation in decision-making.	Participation	Background factors
The support of the senior managers of the organization for the merit programs, the existence of mutual trust in the organization, and the activity with joy and cheerfulness (high spirit)	Supportive atmosphere	
Availability of suitable facilities and equipment (hardware and software), training of employees in the field of using hardware and software, easy access	New technologies	

to the international Internet network, correct use of information and communication technology.		
Real employment of employees (not pretending to be employed), welcoming constructive criticism	Facilitating rules and regulations	Intervening factors
Availability of suitable facilities and equipment (hardware and software), training of employees in the field of using hardware and software, easy access to the international Internet network, correct use of information and communication technology.	merit	
The ability to convey concepts (teaching ability), ethics, and proper behavior of teachers, and continuous interaction with learners	Teachers	
Approving laws and regulations facilitating competence, selecting managers based on criteria, decentralization, and granting legal power and more authority to managers.	coaching	
Accepting criticism, consultation in school affairs, active participation in various school programs, participation in international and national conferences and workshops.	flexibility	
Relative assignment of affairs to staff and students, mutual trust and respect, membership in various official and unofficial groups	Delegation of authority	
Faith in the unique creator, piety and piety, commitment and responsibility, intellectual independence and freedom of thought, creativity and innovative thinking, always learning, self-control, specialization, a clear vision of one's goals in the future, having vision and values Clear and acceptable, positive attitude towards lifelong learning, desire to make comprehensive change and development in one's job, good character and ethics in personal and work relationships, having systemic thinking, social maturity, optimistic, creative and innovative	Good citizen	
Obtaining acceptable grades at the end of the academic year, graduating with an acceptable academic degree, being able to continue studying at higher academic levels, leading all matters towards the merit of the school with a managerial insight and attitude, helping the professional development of teachers, forward-looking, interactive, and Team work, attention to creativity and innovation	The academic success of students	
Designing and implementing a strategic plan with the participation of school councils (participatory management), establishing continuous and appropriate communication between the school, family, and community, and monitoring and control.	Social network mismanagement	Competence of generation management
The rule of the spirit of constant learning over the school, the distribution of knowledge effectively and broadly, the cultivation and promotion of strategic thinking, and the diet of educational changes in the school.	Reducing social harm	

The analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes related to the lived experiences of teachers and school managers in Sanandaj:

Theme 1: Digital Engagement

Participants noted that Generation G is highly engaged with digital tools and platforms. Teachers

reported that students are more motivated when lessons incorporate technology, such as multimedia presentations and online resources. One teacher stated:

"When I use videos or interactive quizzes, I can see their eyes light up. They are more involved in the learning process."

However, some educators expressed concerns about the depth of this engagement, emphasizing that while students are comfortable with technology, they sometimes lack the critical thinking skills necessary for effective learning.

Theme 2: Communication Barriers

A significant challenge identified by participants was the communication gap between educators and Generation G students. Many teachers observed that students prefer digital communication methods, such as texting or messaging apps, over face-to-face interactions. A school manager remarked:

"It's difficult to get them to participate in discussions. They are so used to chatting online that real conversations seem daunting to them."

This shift in communication style necessitates that educators adapt their approaches to foster better engagement with their students.

Theme 3: Adaptation Challenges

Teachers reported feeling the pressure to continuously update their skills to keep pace with technological advancements. Many expressed a desire for professional development opportunities that focus on integrating technology into their teaching practices. One participant shared:

"I want to use technology effectively, but I often feel overwhelmed by how fast things are changing. More training would help us adapt better."

These insights indicate that while educators recognize the importance of integrating technology, they often feel ill-equipped to do so effectively.

Theme 4: Cultural Context

The cultural background of Sanandaj plays a crucial role in shaping the educational experiences of both teachers and students. Participants highlighted the importance of understanding local values and traditions when implementing educational practices. A teacher noted:

"Our students come from diverse backgrounds. It's essential to incorporate their cultural experiences into the classroom to make learning relevant."

Recognizing the cultural context allows educators to create inclusive environments that honor students' identities while addressing their educational needs.

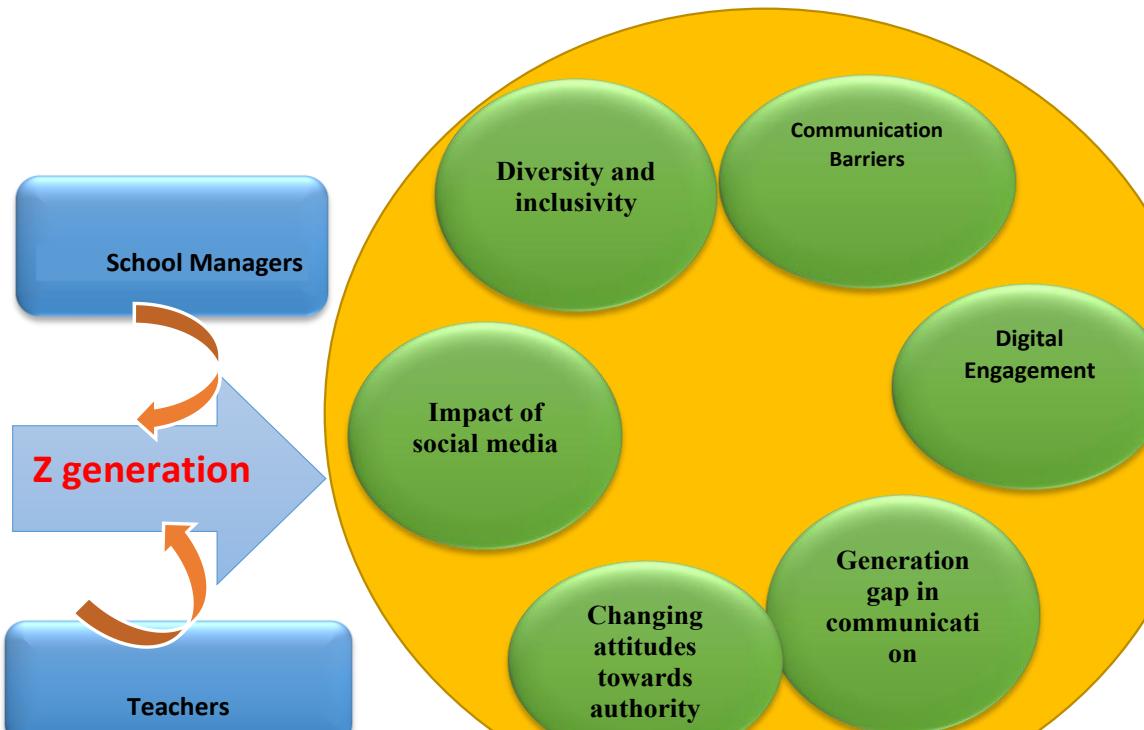
Theme 5: Emotional and Social Dynamics

Participants emphasized the emotional and social challenges faced by students in the digital age. Many educators reported concerns about mental health issues, such as anxiety and social isolation, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A school manager stated:

"We've seen a rise in students struggling with anxiety. The isolation during the pandemic has taken a toll on their mental health."

This theme underscores the need for schools to provide support systems that address the holistic well-being of students.

Chart number (1) summarizes the concepts taken from the interviews



Conclusion:

In conclusion, the phenomenology of lived experiences of teachers and managers in relation to Generation Z offers valuable insights into the dynamics of contemporary education. By exploring their perceptions, challenges, and interactions with Gen Z students, we can better understand the complex factors shaping teaching and leadership practices in the 21st century. Moving forward, educators and administrators need to adapt to the changing needs and realities of the Z generation, fostering a more inclusive and responsive educational environment.

Experience of technology use:

Teachers and managers may express how technology plays a significant role in the lives of Gen Z students, shaping their learning and communication styles. For example, teachers may describe how Gen Z students prefer digital tools for research and collaboration, while managers may discuss the challenges of integrating technology into school policies and practices.

2. Generation gap in communication:

Teachers and managers may reflect on the differences in communication styles between themselves and Gen Z students. For instance, teachers may find it challenging to connect with students who prefer texting over face-to-face conversations, while managers may struggle to communicate expectations effectively in a digital world.

3. Changing attitudes towards authority:

Teachers and managers may observe shifts in attitudes towards authority among Gen Z students, who may question traditional hierarchies and seek more autonomy in their learning. This could lead to tensions between teachers, managers, and students in the educational setting.

4. Impact of social media:

Teachers and managers may discuss the influence of social media on the behavior and attitudes of Gen Z students. For example, teachers may note the prevalence of cyberbullying and online distractions, while managers may explore strategies for promoting positive digital citizenship among students.

5. Diversity and inclusivity:

Teachers and managers may reflect on the diverse backgrounds and experiences of Gen Z students, highlighting the importance of creating inclusive and equitable learning environments. This could involve addressing issues of privilege, bias, and discrimination in the educational setting.

The findings of the present research are consistent with the research results of Ahmadifar and Abdulmaleki (2024). Also, the findings of this research are consistent with the research of Chankaya (2020), Demir (2021), and Sarchehani et al. (2018). Contextual factors included (participation, supportive atmosphere, and technology), which the results of this question are aligned with the studies of Miller and Mills (2019) and Stedman and Brown (2020). The intervening factors included (rules, competence, and lecturers), which the results of this part of the research confirm the results of the studies of Gohari Moghadam et al. (2021) and Abbaspour et al. (2020). Also, strategic factors included (coaching, flexibility, and delegation). The results of this part of the research confirm the results of the studies of Chankaya (2020) and Demir (2021). Finally, the competencies of the leadership of the generation included (citizen, academic success, mismanagement of social networks, and reduction of social harms). The results of this part of the research confirm the results of the studies of Sartman (2021) and Hernandez et al. (2020).

Recommendations

Professional Development: Educational institutions should provide ongoing training for teachers that focuses on integrating technology effectively into their teaching practices.

Cultural Responsiveness: Curriculum development should prioritize culturally responsive teaching methods that reflect the diverse backgrounds of students.

Mental Health Support: Schools should implement support systems that address the emotional and social well-being of students, including mental health resources and counseling services.

Community Engagement: Educators should engage with parents and the wider community to foster a collaborative approach to education that values local traditions and cultural heritage.

In conclusion, understanding the lived experiences of teachers and school managers in relation to

Generation G is crucial for developing educational frameworks that meet the needs of contemporary learners. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, particularly in diverse cultural contexts, to develop strategies that enhance educational outcomes for all students.

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