

Generational Attitudes to Teaching Approaches in Economic Education: Case in Bulgaria

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Abstract:

Introduction: The article aims to identify generational attitudes towards appropriate teaching applied to teaching economic disciplines in Bulgaria higher school. The object of research is the students of three generations - X, Y and Z, and the teachers who carry out their education in economics. The research subject is the perceptions and attitudes of students of the three generations - X, Y and Z, and the teaching methods applied for educational purposes.

Methods: A descriptive research strategy was used in the article. Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire survey and processed by rank correlation using Kendall's tau-b and Spearman methods.

Results: As a result of the research, it is established that there is no dependence between the characteristics of individual generations and the preferred teaching methods.

Discussion: Find that different generational characteristics do not affect ads for acquiring new knowledge and skills during the educational process.

Limitations: Only representatives of generations X, Y, and Z were studied in Bulgaria. The study covers the trainees' current advertising, taking into account the results that are statistically significant.

Conclusions: The study found no significant differences in learners' preferences for teaching methods. Therefore, educators can choose appropriate approaches involving interactive video content and smart devices.

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Introduction

One of the essential activities that accompanies us throughout life is education. Formally or informally, through it, we acquire knowledge, new skills and abilities. The learning style of individuals is influenced by social order and the development of technologies characteristic of a given period. Different generations have different learning styles (Djiwandono, 2017), (Smith, 2012). Educational consultant and author Tom Heirk writes, "We have 21st-century students being taught by 20th-century adults using 19th-century pedagogy and 18th-century school calendar tools." (2014, p. 23). He defines it as a "Systemic Dilemma", illustrating the disconnect between teaching methods, the majority generation of teachers and the users of the education service.

Currently, students from different generations are being educated at universities. However, the largest share belongs to the so-called "Generation Z" group. These are young people between the ages of 18 and 22. They are characterized by creativity, flexibility, independence and increased concern for the environment (Sugahara & Boland, 2012; Giray, 2022). They are characterized by independence and the desire to learn many things. For them, the learning process begins with questions from "how to make..." and "how to cook..." to "how to use certain software..." on Google and countless free online tutorials. Compared to other generations, communication is a distinguishing characteristic for them. More than ever, young people communicate constantly, through all means, especially with those who provide them with technology. Generation Z is fully savvy about new technologies (Kula, 2023) and online channels compared to previous generations and Millennials (Homoki, Nyitrai, & Mako, 2023). For these reasons, learning resources and teaching methods need to be in tune with the attitudes of learners of this generation. Their attitudes are multidimensional, and the specificity of the academic environment allows the acquisition of knowledge and skills. However, relationships between different generations can cause difficulties and conflicts (Rupčić, 2018). Therefore, the main characteristic of a productive academic environment is a healthy teacher-student relationship (Opdenakker, Maulana, & Brok, 2012).

The profession of an academic teacher involves performing many diverse tasks. He is simultaneously a scientist, a teacher, and an organizer (Ayllon, Alsina, & Colomer, 2019). In teaching, he transmits the knowledge resulting from his scientific activity. To motivate students to use a diverse set of knowledge and skills aimed at fulfilling the learning process, the teacher should establish a stable relationship with the learners (Bainbridge-Frymier & Houser, 2000).

Various scientific studies show that the interpersonal relationships are an essential prerequisite for students to realize their skills, self-confidence and effectiveness (Brinkworth, McIntire, Juraschek, & Gehlbach, 2018; Pennings et al., 2018). The academic teacher must show a positive attitude towards innovations and changes and accept non-traditional work methods at certain times. Therefore, he must possess moral, spiritual, and intellectual qualities to be a model for student behaviour.

1 Theoretical research on the attitudes of students

A comprehensive analysis of generational problems was first done in 1991 by Howe and Strauss (1991). Today, authors such as Tapscott (2008), Carr (2008), Bauerlein (2009), Prensky (2018), and many others explore topics related to generations and their characteristics.

Generation Z is the first generation to achieve entire interaction with technology and perceive the digital world as an everyday reality. Numerous studies examine their consumer behaviour, their environmental attitudes and their digital connectivity (Tobler, Visschers, & Siergist, 2011; Barber, Bishop, & Gruen, 2014; Maichum, Parichatnon, & Peng, 2017). There are also studies targeting their learning styles Kohut et al., 2010; Rothman, 2016; Povah & Vaukins, 2017; Cilliers, 2017; McNeil, 2018; Poláková & Klímová, 2019; Ifode, 2019; Nicholas, 2020. The impact of technology and the Internet on the various forms of learning of Generation Z is also explored (Szymkowiak, Melović, Dabić, Jeganathan, & Kundi, 2021). The results show that students prefer learning through mobile applications and video content to traditional forms of teaching. Also, Gen Z have shorter attention spans and are impatient. They receive information from all over the world through various sources. However, they prefer digital media to traditional media and feel a constant need to receive new and different types of information (Iliev, Zhelev, & Ilieva, 2023). Ross and Call-Cummings discuss the "field work" strategy. A student-centred approach often involves peers working in groups on topics of interest, where they discuss ideas and receive regular peer feedback (Ross & Call-Cummings, 2020).

One of the latest studies on the teaching-learning nexus looks at the role of the interactive approach in teaching students of the digital generation (Kalnitskaya & Maksimochkina, 2023). The authors identify priority learners based on their characteristics. They conclude that using an interactive learning approach aligns with the digital generation's characteristics, producing positive effects. This is mainly due to a more significant opportunity to increase the interaction between the teacher and the students in the learning environment.

Among the Bulgarian studies on Generation Z, that of Aleksandrov and his team stands out (Aleksandrov et al., 2022). It discusses various characteristics of the Bulgarian Generation Z. The values of the new generation in the ethical sense,

such as tolerance, personal space and free time, are highlighted. How Gen Zers receive, interpret and validate information. Young people view secondary and tertiary education and how the educational model could be changed to reflect their values. The study's authors conclude that dealing with Generation Z representatives must be approached strategically, informedly, and delicately to avoid potential intergenerational conflicts.

2 Methodology

The authors aim to identify the attitudes of different generations regarding certain aspects of teaching approaches and methods used in teaching economic disciplines. The object of research is the students of three generations - X, Y and Z, and the teachers who carry out their education in economics. The research subject is the perceptions and attitudes of students of the three generations - X, Y and Z, and the teaching methods applied for educational purposes.

A descriptive research strategy was used in the study, with the help of which it is registered whether there are any dependencies between belonging to a specific worship and its attitude to the educational process. The data were collected directly from the subjects. As the most appropriate descriptive method for collecting primary quantitative data, the survey was chosen, which was carried out through a survey among the respondents. Data were collected through two questionnaire surveys with structured questionnaires and pre-formulated responses. Two-dimensional distributions and histograms were used to present the results. Ordering relationships between categories of a given variable are represented by ordinal (rank) scales. Calculations were made with the IBM SPSS software product.

3 Results and discussion

The survey was carried out among students of majors with an economic profile. The questionnaire includes 23 questions, 5 of which describe the characteristics of the studied population (age, gender, course, form of study, educational institution), and 13 of which measure the respondents' preferences for teaching methods. Based on the age indicated by the respondents, they were divided into three generations (see Table 1). Generation Z includes students up to 26, including those born between 1997 and 2010. They represent 48% (318 respondents). Generation Y includes students aged between 27 and 42 or born between 1981 and 1996. They are 40% (264 respondents). Generation X are students over 43 or those born between 1965 and 1980. They are 12% (80 respondents).

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Table 1

Respondents by generation

<u>Generation</u>	<u>Years</u>	<u>Born between</u>	<u>Number of respondents</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Gen Z	up to 26	1997 and 2010	318	48%
Gen Y	between 27 and 42	1981 and 1996	246	40%
Gen X	over 43	1965 and 1980	80	12%
Total	-	-	662	100%

To explore students' perceptions of the methods of presentation of course content, nine questions were asked regarding note-taking, inclusion of text, illustrations, video in presentations, use of examples and case studies, links to additional information, control questions, provision for free use of the materials from the lecture. The results of the survey show that students mainly prefer, when the teacher presents the learning content, to use examples from practice (96% with answers "yes" and "rather yes") (see Table 2). With a similar priority, they wish the teaching material to be presented with more figures and illustrations (94% with answers "yes" and "rather yes"). In the last two places, they put the methods which include presentations with a predominant text and the inclusion of links to additional information during a lecture, for example, with 79% and 76% positive responses ("yes" and "rather yes").

Table 2

Ranking of methods for presenting the learning content, according to the percentage of positive responses

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Questions ...: Do you accept the method where the teacher ...</u>	<u>Positive answers (yes + rather yes)</u>
1	6: ... includes practical examples in his presentations?	96%
2	3: ... uses presentations with relevant figures and/or illustrations on each slide to reinforce your visual memory?	94%
3	9: ... makes the presentations and/or materials freely available to you?	92%
4	4: ... uses video content developed by him or freely available on the Internet (for example, on You tube)?	87%
5	5: ... uses case studies that he sets to solve during the class?	86%
6	8: ... uses short tests (up to 1-2 questions) to check whether you have mastered the current material?	83%
7	1: ... dictates and you take notes?	81%
8	2: ... uses presentations with a predominant text part during lectures?	79%
9	7: ... includes in his presentations links to additional information during the lectures?	76%

The calculated Kendall and Spearman rank correlation coefficients between the preferences of different colonies regarding teaching methods showed a weak

correlation dependence and were below 0.2. The evaluation of the results is based on the following scale: $0 < R < 0.3$ - weak correlation; $0.3 < R < 0.5$ - moderate correlation; $0.5 < R < 0.7$ - significant correlation; $0.7 < R < 0.9$ - high correlation; $0.9 < R < 1$ - very high correlation. (see Table 3).

Table 3

<i>Correlation coefficients between generations and the answers to the questions</i>		
<i>Questions ...: Do you accept the method where the teacher ...</i>	<i>Kendall's tau-b</i>	<i>Spearman's (R)</i>
1: ... dictates and you take notes?	.069*	.077*
2: ... uses presentations with a predominant text part during lectures?	-.006	-.007
3: ... uses presentations with relevant figures and/or illustrations on each slide to reinforce your visual memory?	-.005	-.005
4: ... uses video content developed by him or freely available on the Internet (for example, on You tube)?	-.072*	-.079*
5: ... uses case studies that he sets to solve during the class?	.056	.061
6: ... includes practical examples in his presentations?	.017	.018
7: ... the teacher includes in his presentations links to additional information during the lectures?	-.099**	-.112**
8: ... uses short tests (up to 1-2 questions) to check whether you have mastered the current material?	-.075*	-.083*
9: ... makes the presentations and/or materials freely available to you?	-.077*	-.082*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The second group includes four questions analyzing essential aspects of the lecturer's behaviour during a lecture, such as short breaks to change the topic, tolerance for students to ask questions, dividing significant topics into small parts, and using mobile phones in the learning process during a lecture. Based on the positive responses shown in Table 4, first of all, students accept the division of extended topics into smaller parts (93% with answers "yes" and "rather yes"). Afterwards, students preferred to ask questions at any time (83% with yes and instead yes answers). There is no affinity among students for the use of mobile phones for educational purposes during a lecture (71% with answers "yes" and "rather yes") and the use of short breaks with a change of topic (59% with answers "yes" and "rather yes").

Table 4

Ranking of the teacher's behaviour according to positive responses

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Questions ...: Do you accept the approach where the teacher ...</i>	<i>Positive answers (yes + rather yes)</i>
1	3: ... divides long topics (lectures) into smaller parts?	93%
2	2: ... encourages (allows) you to interrupt him and ask him questions?	83%
3	4: ... encourages you, during lectures, to use your phones for educational purposes?	71%
4	1: ... takes short breaks with a change of topic?	59%

When examining the correlation between the perceptions of students of different generations and the approaches applied by the teacher during a lecture, the calculated Kendall and Spearman coefficients did not show such a correlation (Table 5). All coefficients have values below 0.2.

Table 5

Correlation coefficients between generations and the answers to the questions

<i>Questions ...: Do you accept the approach where the teacher ...</i>	<i>Kendall's tau-b</i>	<i>Spearman's (R)</i>
1: ... takes short breaks with a change of topic?	-.041	-.048
2: ... encourages (allows) you to interrupt him and ask him questions?	.121**	.134**
3: ... divides long topics (lectures) into smaller parts?	.081*	.087*
4: ... encourages you, during lectures, to use your phones for educational purposes?	.112**	.126**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of the results shows that students prefer to present knowledge during a lecture using visual elements (figures, illustrations, video content). They want the learning content to be presented, shown, or proven with a real-life example, graphic, illustration, or video. It is why visuals are positioned in the top four positions of preference.

Including video as a method of presenting educational content has a relatively high potential for development. Students love it, and it perfectly matches the Gen Z characteristics of perceiving more with their eyes than with their ears. Video content makes it possible in a few minutes to demonstrate (show) knowledge that requires explanations written on dozens of pages. Here, it is necessary to clarify that the video content does not mean only a recording of the lecturer's face while giving a standard lecture.

The second group of questions is related to the lecturer's behaviour during the lecture. They aim to test the extent to which generations (primarily Gen Z) adopt behaviours which correspond to some of the critical characteristics of the

younger generation. The characteristic of Generation Z is their short attention span and preference to receive information divided into smaller parts in smaller volumes. Responses to the questions indicated a preference for breaking long lectures into smaller parts but breaks with topic changes could be better accepted. Regarding the freedom to interrupt and ask the lecturer questions, we entirely match the students' attitudes and the lecturers' actions. The shortening of the distance, through the freedom for two-way communication between teacher and students, stimulates real inclusion in the learning process, not just reporting presence in the classroom. Incorporating their smartphones into the learning process was rated highest by Gen Z compared to their older counterparts. There are now many apps (e.g. Kahoot!) which the lecturers can use to make their lectures engaging and interactive using students' electronic devices.

As with video content, there are many untapped opportunities to engage the attention of cold people during a lecture. On the one hand, Generation Z wants to use technology, interact with the learning environment and receive feedback on their achievements at every stage of learning. On the other hand, smartphones are constantly in the hands of the younger generation, and any attempts to ban their use or confiscate them will soon be met with resistance and a negative effect. One of the possible solutions is the inclusion of personal smart devices in the educational process. A short quiz of 2-3 questions, implemented using an application through students' smartphones, including a competitive element, would increase the attention and interest of colds during a lecture in both natural and digital environments. Analysis of the results did not confirm the research team's initial expectations of differences in students' preferences conditioned by their generational characteristics. On the contrary, they were categorically refuted.

The initial argument that there were differences resulted from the many publications describing a new, different way of learning in Generation Z compared to the preceding Generations Y and X. If each generation is considered in its time slice, one finds such a differentiation, but if they are placed in modern conditions, under the same circumstances, significant differences between them will hardly stand out. The reason for this can be found in the overall development of technologies and teaching methods. The aim has always been to improve learning to facilitate learners by using new technologies and discovering new teaching methods. The educational content should be as accessible and complete as possible, regardless of which generation the economics students are from. A problem would arise in the reverse situation if we used methods and techniques from a quarter of a century ago. This may be suitable for the older Gen X and achieve the expected results, but it will be disastrous for the younger Gen Z.

Attention can also be directed to the answers to the question, "Do you accept the method where the teacher dictates and you take notes?". By its nature, this is an archaic teaching technique, and the research team expected this method would be firmly rejected or have a small number of supporters, mainly among Generation X. However, the results showed a very high approval rate among all three generations, initially shocking to the research team. If 20-30 years ago, information was not so easily accessible and students had to take notes, now Generation Z has access to any information. Logically, there is no point in Gen Z trying to take notes. However, the answer lies in this contradiction. These "two sheets" of notes (more likely to be in electronic form, on a laptop or tablet) provide them with synthesized knowledge delivered directly by the teacher. This eliminates the need for multiple Internet sources to select and process relevant content. It saves them time and effort. We must remember that volume is a severe issue for Gen Z and takes time. They prefer the critical information be presented as a summary on at least one page. Textbooks are a little information in a vast volume.

4 Future research directions

In primary and secondary education, there is a clear division into age groups, which are compulsory for all students. Students in these levels are generally the same age, with any age differences usually limited to one or two years, as required by regulatory norms established by the state. In contrast, higher education is not mandatory, and the student's choice ultimately determines the composition of the graduations and student groups in the universities. As a result, mixing different generations becomes possible and increasingly common. Until about 25-30 years ago, relatively stable age homogeneity was observed in higher education in Bulgaria. Now, the trend of "ageing" students is changing the situation.

This "ageing" trend provides new opportunities for analyzing generational differences. Suppose the representatives of different generations are studied independently of each other. If each generation is examined in its environment and compared, the results will be the same. However, the results will differ if representatives of different generations are examined and placed in the same environment. The objects of research (students of the three generations), placed in the same learning environment in the higher education institution, interact with each other, subsequently leading to a change in themselves. This is why the results vary.

Conclusions

Through the present study, the team was able to study the attitudes of three generations of students towards the teaching methods and behaviour used in the economic classroom. The results showed no significant differences between the preferences of the three generations of students, which gives us the confidence to say the generational differences can easily be overcome using suitable approaches. Rejecting the claim, there are generational differences in teaching method preferences should eliminate the concerns of lecturers facing a multigenerational audience. If the lecturer has prepared the educational content's presentation and the methods used are correctly selected, all generations will accept the information he presents. In such a case, the choice of methods for presenting the learning content should be tailored to the attitudes of the younger generation in the audience. There are still untapped opportunities to improve interactivity through video content and the inclusion of smart devices in the learning process.

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