

Adapting to a New Generation: Teaching Journey of Nurse Educators

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Abstract

The study used a descriptive phenomenological method in exploring the lived experience of Nurse educators teaching Generation Z students through in-depth interviews and utilized Colaizzi's (1978) method in data analysis. The study revealed six emerging themes: *Educators' addressing Emotional Concerns, Educators' shift of classroom dynamics, Educators' pivotal role in technological integration, Navigating the attention and engagement challenge of Educators, Educators embracing multimodal learning preferences, and Educators' Adaptivity*. The study concludes that Nurse educator faces distinct challenges and opportunities given the Gen Z learners, addressing emotional sensitivity, strong technology use, and preference for interactive learning. This points out the need for Nurse educators to be adaptive in all aspects, including being emotionally equipped, embracing varied instructional strategies, fostering digital literacy, and supporting the development of independent learning skills.

Keywords: *Nurse Educators; Teaching Strategies; Emotional concerns; Adaptive Teaching; Classroom management; Technological integration; Generation Z.*

1. Introduction

The generational diversity in higher education faces challenges in engaging and retaining students, as their attitudes and tendencies may not align with the expectations of faculty teaching their courses. Faculty members have expressed concerns about the "entitled" and unprepared Millennial student (Goldman and Martin, 2016; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Miller & Mills, 2019). and now they are facing a newer Generation, Gen Z, who has a unique view of life.

Educators describe Gen Z as impatient, quick-witted, lacking aspiration compared to earlier generations, having a shorter attention span, highly reliant on technology, independent, self-directed, and most materialistic, demanding, and entitled (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Gen Z has higher levels of narcissism, overconfidence, aversion to unpleasant situations, and an emphasis on accolades and good marks (Ang et al, 2022; Twenge, 2013).

Locally, one of the Nursing School of General Santos City, Philippines, seven nurse educators described Gen Z students as tech-savvy and able to adapt to technology quickly, in which they can find information with just a tap of their fingers. These students are also visually motivated and tend to rely on technology. However, four of the nurse educators noted that these students often have a short attention span. The educators perceive them as lacking determination and being highly sensitive, which makes it challenging for them to maintain focus amidst digital distractions. Additionally, adapting teaching methods to align with these students' preferences for technology integration has become a common experience for nursing educators.

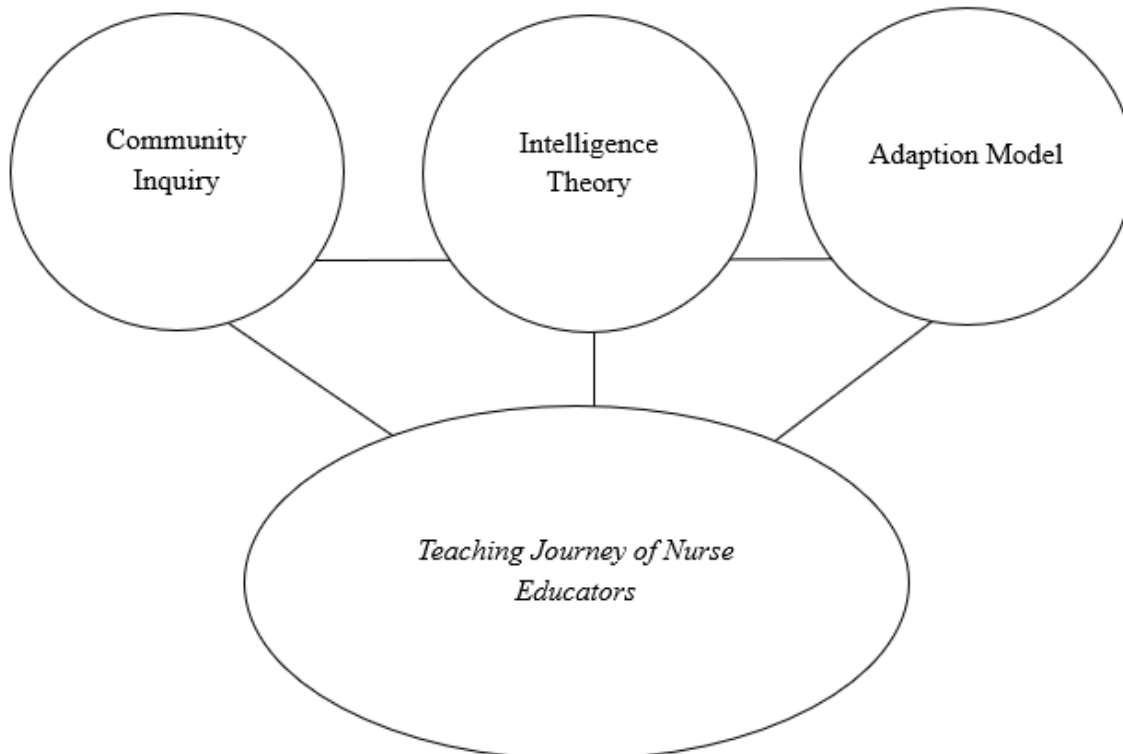
1.2. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored to the following theories: the critical thinking and community inquiry of Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2000)) model consists of the three elements essential to the educational experience, which are (a) cognitive presence, (b) social presence, and (c) teaching presence, also theory of Robert Sternberg's Intelligence theory (2005) WICS which stands for wisdom, intelligence, creativity, synthesized (Sternberg, 1997, 1999b, 2003b, 2005b; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004; 2012) and Calista Roy's Adaptation model focused on how nurse educators had adapted their teaching methods to the needs of Generation Z learners provides a framework for understanding the various factors influencing nurse educators in modern educational environments, by recognizing and analyzing the various internal and external stimuli that impact Nurse educators, along with the cognitive and physiological processes involved in adaptation. The theoretical framework diagram illustrates the connections among the theories: Critical thinking and community inquiry of Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (2000), Robert Sternberg's Intelligence theory, or Sternberg (2005),

WICS, and Calista Roy Adaptation model (Harris,2021) that the researcher utilized in this study, which was discussed above.

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework Diagram

1.3. Statement of the Problem



The study describes the experience of the Nurse Educators in teaching Gen Z nursing students at General Santos City. Specifically, answered the central question:

How do nursing educators describe their experience in teaching Gen Z students in General Santos City?

2. Methodology

This study used a descriptive qualitative research method, the phenomenological design, which explored the experiences of the Journey of Nurse Educators of Teaching Gen Z students. The study employed purposeful sampling, utilizing inclusion and exclusion criteria in selecting the participants. Participants are

those who have been teaching for more than 7 years; otherwise, they will be excluded. The study used in-depth, open-ended, and structured questions. The research instrument used one grand-tour question, and supported with a guide of questions that were formulated through the use of ‘floating prompts’ (Churchill, 1973; McCracken). The guide question used in the study was established using the guide question framed using McCracken's long interview (2013). The open-ended question allowed the researcher to expand the realm of possibilities and give all the attention to the Nurse Educators' unique experience in facilitating, mentoring, and testimony (McCracken and McCracken, 1988). Utilizing McCracken’s four-stage model for qualitative inquiry provided a structured and reflexive approach for conducting long interviews and interpreting cultural data.

Box 1. Participant Years as Educator

Participants	Years as Nurse Educator
Participant 1	14 years
Participant 2	18 years
Participant 3	11 years
Participant 4	12 years
Participant 5	14 years
Participant 6	19 years
Participant 7	20 years
Participant 8	20 years
Participant 9	18 years
Participant 10	24 years

2.1 Data Analysis

The Colaizzi’s (1978) descriptive phenomenological methods were used to analyze the lived experience of Nurse Educators teaching Gen Z. The descriptive phenomenological design of the study has

captured the essence of the lived experience of nurse educators. The study followed the four critical steps; bracketing, intuiting, analyzing, and describing (DeRobertis, 2021).

Step 1 of Colaizzi's (1978) , Gaining Overall Understanding, researcher transcribed the interview and then read each transcript three to four times (Colaizzi, 1978) to gain immersion. This allowed a holistic grasp of nurse educator's perspective, challenge, and involving roles in teaching Gen Z learners. Step 2, Extracting Significant Statements, key statements that captured essential experience were identified, recorded with transcript references, and reviewed by the thesis advisor and experts for clarify and completeness. Step 3, Formulation of Meanings, General meaning were derived from each significant statement. Bracketing (Husserl, 1960) was used to suspend research bias, focusing on the authentic voices of participants. Step 4. Clustering Meaning into Themes, Formulating meaning were grouped into clusters, reflecting aspects such as emotional adaptation, instructional change, and role transformation. These clusters were synthesized into six emergent themes, reviewed for accuracy by the thesis advisor. Step 5, Exhausting Description: All meaning and themes were integrated into a comprehensive description of how nurse educators navigate emotional fragility, engagement issues, and technology-driven dynamics in teaching Gen Z. Step 6, Fundamental Structure, The finding were distilled into a concise conceptual framework capturing the essence of the nurse educator's lives experience. Step 7, Validation with Participants, The composite descriptive was returned to participants for confirmation, ensuring accuracy and authenticity of the final representation.

3. Results & Discussion

Table 1 Formulated Clusters and Emergent Themes

Clustered Theme	Emerging Theme
Managing the Emotional fragility of students	Educators Addressing Emotional Concerns
Navigating Mental Health sensitivity in the classroom	
Educators adjust their tone to prevent emotional shutdown	
Students challenge the Instructions and rules	Educator's shift of classroom dynamics
Students prefer friendly, less authoritarian figures	

Depends on gadgets for everything	Educators' pivotal role in technological integration
Copy-paste behavior	
Misuses technology academically	
Reluctant to verify sources	
Easily distracted	Navigating the attention and engagement challenge of Educators
Needs constant engagement	
Poor retention of verbal instructions	
Prefers videos, visuals, and storytelling	Educators embracing multimodal learning preferences
Responds well to demonstration	
Thrives on engaging formats	
Student response to a nurturing, friendly approach	Educators Adaptivity
Educators adjust tone to prevent emotional shutdown	
Prefer patient and flexible Educators	
Need a balance of authority and friendliness	

The first emerging theme is that Educators addressing Emotional Concerns with a cluster theme of Managing the Emotional fragility of students, Navigating Mental Health sensitivity in the classroom, in which Nurse Educators observe and describe that Gen Z that they have heightened emotional sensitivity (Kusaini & Amalianita, 2024). Participants frequently describe this generation as emotionally fragile, reacting strongly to situations that prior cohorts might have handled with more resilience (Dwidienawati et. al, 2025). Nurse Educators shared that even mild reprimand often led to tears or emotional withdrawal.

“Now,..., madali lang sila ma-ano, sensitive sila. .. meron silang term eh, dapat may mga mental health pa yan silang sinasabi.”

Now,..., they're easily affected, they're sensitive. So, it's like, you have to be, you know..- about mental health and all that

Transcript 6, Participant 6

“as a CI, you have to..., be patience for the students kasi para, ano, hindi sila ma- a-trauma kasi nga sensitive ang gen Z na group, di ba?... Ngayon, parang, parang matakot ka na magkaroon ng mental problem ang students. ”

As a CI you have to be patience to the students because, you know, so that they won't get traumatized, since Gen Z is a sensitive group, right? Now it's like, you're more afraid that your students might develop mental health issues.

Transcript 6, Participant 6

The second emerging theme is Educator's shift of classroom dynamics, since the participants experience that Gen Z students display a notable resistance to authority, even challenging the hierarchies. Compared to the previous generation, who were more reserved. With the following emerging themes: Students challenge the Instructions and rules, Students prefer friendly, and less authoritarian figures. Gen Z students are often so confident and assertive (Mizser, 2023), and sometimes bordering on entitlement, as the participant stated.

“They wanted to voice their opinion. Opinionated sila. .. Meron , silang sariling rule na gusto nila is that sila ang ma follow..” They wanted to voice their opinion...They have their own rules that they want others to follow.

Transcript 3, Participant 3

“ pag na over familiarize ka talaga, familiarized..Wala na, yung kanilang respect parang nawala..” when they become too familiar with you..., that's it, their respect kind of disappears.

Transcript 9, Participant 9

The third emerging theme is Educators' pivotal role in technological integration with cluster theme: Depends on gadgets for everything, Copy-paste behavior, Misuses technology academically, Reluctant to verify sources. Gen Z are praised for being Tech-savvy, that this is one of their strengths(Hammad, 2025) but it turned into a double-edged sword. Gen Z students rely heavily and dependably on digital tools for nearly every aspect, often the expense of critical thinking, originality, and academic rigor, with the participants' statement,

“Kung technology-wise, wonderful sila maghimog mga PPT presentation. But, nag-rely lang din... first browser, ito na. Ito na yung copy-paste nila.”

Technology-wise, they’re great at making PPT. But they just relied on first site they opened on their browser, that’s it. That’s what they copy pasted.

Transcript 7, Participant 7

“It’s just for the compliance... they don’t understand what they wrote kaya nga hindi nila ginagamit ng maayos yung technology.”

It’s just for compliance... they don’t understand what they wrote. That’s why they don’t use technology properly.

Transcript 1, Participant 1

The fourth emerging theme Navigating the attention and engagement challenge of Educators with cluster theme; Easily distracted, Needs constant engagement, Poor retention of verbal instructions which was noticeable characteristic of Gen Z of having short attention span learners (Hammad, 2025). With emerging themes; Easily distracted, Needs constant engagement, Poor retention of verbal instruction. Described as easily bored and mentally scattered, these students often struggle to maintain focus in traditional learning environments. Participants shared,

“Kasabi ko lng ... tapos ano yon isr? Attention span ,Short, Parang madali sila ma-bore”. I had just speak, ‘Sir, was that it? Their attention span is Really short. They get bored easily. I’m not sure how those who do lecture manage, ma’am.”

Transcript 9, Participant 9

“Pag hindi mo e variation young teaching mo, ma mabored na yan sila, hindi na yan makiking”. If you don’t add variation to your teaching, they’ll get bored and stop listening.

Transcript 6, Participant 6

The fifth emerging theme is Educators embracing multimodal learning preference, with clustered theme;

Prefers videos, visual and storytelling, Responds well to demonstration. Thrives on engaging formats with the landscape of nursing education, Educators has observed a distinct shift in how Gen Z learners engage with content. A common pattern described by the participant, which are the emerging theme, as follows: prefers videos, visual and storytelling, demonstration preference, and thrives on engaging formats. The Gen Z student has been describe as Audio-visual learners (Kumar & Mamgain, 2023) and a prefers collaborative learning as remark by Participant,

“Gen Z man gud na Learners, aside from from they are kanang audio-visual learners, ganahan pod ni sila o kanang collaborative learning”. Gen Z learners, aside from being audio-visual learners, also really like collaborative learning. They enjoy Group yourselves into five, then discuss.

Transcript 1, Participant 1

“ Hindi ba, ayaw yan nila na mag-lecture ka ng mahaba without ano yung merong variation yung lecture mo”. They don’t like it when you lecture for too long without any variation.

Transcript 9, Participant 9

“They need a multi or variety of approach to handle them.”

Transcript 10, Participant 10

“ In managing class,.. Nag-download ako ng icebreaker..Meron ako dance, dance. In managing the class, I download icebreaker into a folder. I have a ‘dance-dance activity.

Transcript 8, Participant 8

The sixth emerging theme, Educators Adaptivity, in response to the changing learners and learning preferences of Gen Z. CI have been compelled to redefine their traditional roles and adopt more flexible incorporated with student-centered approached. With the following clustered theme: student response to nurturing friendly approach, adjust tone to prevent emotional shutdown, patient and flexible CI.

Participant have noted a significant shift in teaching approaches, moving away from authoritarian methods toward more nurturing, patient, and friendly interactions (. As Participant mentioned, this change

emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and engaging learning environment for this generation.

“But I guess, very important kasi yung you talk to them na hindi ka gani strict manner. Yung parang, ah, parang ano ka lang. Yung parang motherly. Pinapagalitan.. But motherly approach ka rin, kung mag-strict ka ganyan. Sa kanila. Parang, they cannot concentrate..tense sila”. But I think it’s very important to talk to them in a way that isn’t too strict – like, but my approach is more motherly.. Because they seem to be struggling emotionally. If you’re too strict. I notice they can’t concentrate, they get tense.

Transcript 8, Participant 8

“ Pero ngayon, ano, alam i-balance ba, kasi dapat maging friend tayo sa kanila pero maging strict din tayo”. But now, it’s like... it’s hard to find the balance. We need to be their friend, but we also have to be strict. always say , we teach them, but at the same time, we’re also learning from them.

Transcript 9, Participant 9

“ Gen Z, I, you need to somehow adapt to their method, as long as I don't, I don't sidestep the laws,..with them is challenging in the sense that sometimes the fragility of their emotions. o fragile with their emotions.... So it requires also your sense of being resourceful and creative”. With Gen Z, you really need to adapt to their methods, as long as you don’t sidesteps the law and principles of education. Being with them is challenging, especially because of the fragility of their emotions...It also requires being resourceful and creative.

Transcript 10, Participant 10

3.1. Implication

The most striking changes the nurse educator noted were the shift away from authoritarian approaches to a more nurturing, patient, and friendlier demeanor. Gen Z learners are less likely to respond positively to rigid authority and more likely to disengage emotionally if confronted harshly. Pedagogically, Nurse educators

strategize and design varied, interactive and for students to be responsive with the lessons. Today's nurse educators are using multi-model, tech-integrated methods to sustain attention and relevance, incorporating social media, storytelling, and real-world context into lessons to match students' expectations and attention capacities.

3.2. Conclusion

The journey of Nurse educators driven by the unique characteristics and behaviors of Generation Z students, brings a whole new experience, expectations, and challenges of Nurse Educators and in the academic environment that require an evolution of instructional approaches, communication, and classroom management. Through adaptivity, educators can cater to the needs of Gen Z students. In response to the changing learning preferences and emotional dynamics of Gen Z students, Nurse educators have been compelled to redefine traditional roles and adopt more flexible. As generations of students keep evolving, they reshape the academic landscape; nurse educators must continue to develop a generational approach that fits their learners, including developing emotional and professional readiness that is crucial for the nursing practice. By accepting the innovation and the dynamic learner, this will prepare institutions, administrators, policy makers, and better-equipped Nurse educators who will train future Nurses for the real world.

3.3. Recommendation

Nurse educators require more than subject expertise; emotional consideration should be included, like empathy, adaptability, and innovation. A study by Poehner (2024) highlights the powerful impact of well-structured classroom management not just in supporting academic learning, but also in helping students grow socially and emotionally. Likewise, higher education institutions and policymakers need to take into consideration the distinct characteristics and behavior of each generation to deliver targeted support and guidance. By leveraging tools such as interactive simulations, virtual learning environments, and multimedia resources, instructors can create a dynamic learning experience that caters to the varied learning styles and preferences (MCcall, 2024). Additionally, nurse educators should have regular training and seminars that focus

on building skills like empathy, adaptability, and using new teaching technologies. These opportunities will help teachers connect more effectively with their students and create a more engaging, supportive learning environment.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following. First, to the Almighty God for granting me the strength and wisdom, and perseverance to complete this study.

The Notre Dame of Dadiangas Universtiy (NDDU), the Panel: Dr. Gaudy C. Ortizo, Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Rue Flora P. Ruiz, RN, Dean - College of Health Sciences, Dr. Aaron Carlo C. Decendario, RN, Reza Rose E. Tuban, RN, MAN, and Lourdes O. Decrepito, RN, MAN. To Dr. Claire T. Espiritu, RN, MAN, MIC, for the invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and unwavering support throughout the development of this study. My sincere thanks to my General Santos Doctors Medical School Foundation Inc. (GSDMSFI) family for their academic and moral support and for granting me the opportunity to pursue my graduate studies. To my beloved husband Joeffrey C. Padilla, thank you for your unwavering support and unconditional love, patience, and constant encouragement during this journey. Your support has been a source of strength and motivation at every stage.

Once again, I give all glory and thanks to God, whose grace made all things possible.

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