

GENERATION ALPHA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FACULTY MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the study of the Alpha Generation in higher education. The Alpha Generation, born in 2010 and after, is a generation that actively uses technology that was still in its school years. This study, in which faculty members' perceptions of the Alpha generation that will be university students in the future were investigated, was conducted with the qualitative research method to understand in depth what meaning the faculty members ascribe to the Alpha generation. For this purpose, the interviews were conducted with the faculty members at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Faculty members expect to be prepared for the new generation of digital and global education, which is changing fast. Learning skills and the ability to apply concepts and understandings affect how we view information differently. Furthermore, technological advancements in higher education play a crucial role in the teaching-learning approaches of the future, so faculty members are also expected to be knowledgeable and experienced about the Alpha Generation's next generation of higher education. Therefore, in the future higher education environment, this research can be important for academics and administrators to get the opinions of faculty members on the Alpha generation and to anticipate the opportunities and potential problems. Furthermore, this research has tried to explain the faculty members as the next group of university students, considering the learning styles preferred by the Alpha generation, their perceptions and expectations about education. Finally, this research is illustrated with recommendations on how universities can be transformed to provide a better learning experience aligned with the thoughts, perceptions and expectations of faculty members for Generation Alpha students.

Keywords: Higher Education, Generations, Alpha Generations, Faculty Members, Qualitative Research

Introduction

The impact of technology on education is getting more common. Technology has been changing at a rapid pace in higher education. Education has been essential in developing societies and individuals throughout history. Therefore, raising individuals who keep up with the developments worldwide is necessary. As the social structure and needs change, institutions also undergo a series of changes parallel with this change.

Universities at the top of the education system are closer to the change process (Arslan, 2019). Therefore, higher education institutions need an education model that closely follows the developments and constantly updates itself. Alpha generation as university students will be the newest challenge for academics. Accordingly, higher education institutions are created to meet social needs. Universities, with their functions of producing and disseminating knowledge, both direct the social transformation and are also affected by the social transformation. Therefore, the role and scope of the university, a historical and social institution, have changed within each era's social and economic conditions (Sahin & Alkan, 2016). Technological advances will be crucial in future teaching-learning models in universities, and the next higher-education generation will be embedded with this. Generation Alpha will be very different from traditional university students. In this sense, the Alpha generation will prefer technology-related professions and demonstrate digital leadership, meeting all their education from digital devices. Therefore, it is understood that these generations do not like face-to-face communication (Demirel, 2021). Generation Alpha is surrounded by technology and gaming. They are the first generation exposed to an advanced technological environment (Taylor & Hattingh, 2019).

It is challenging to define a standard generation for every society. Because the experiences of each country in specific periods are different and there are different social structures within the country, consistent results cannot be obtained in these studies. However, this situation may be different for the Alpha generation. Because for the Alpha generation, the physical boundaries of the world have almost disappeared. Even in different parts of the world, they can watch the same movie, listen to the same music and follow the same world agenda. Therefore, unlike previous generations, more consistent predictions can be made to define the Alpha generation (McCrimble & Fell, 2020).

It is an essential first step to defining the term generation. According to Oxford Dictionary (2023), all people were born about the same time. Traditionally, a generation has been described as the average interval between parents' birth and their offspring. This biological definition has placed a generation for millennia at around 20–25 years (McCrimble & Wolfinger, 2010). One of the basic facts is that it is possible to progress and make a distance in social life with the experience and knowledge that one generation will pass on to the next generation. It is stated that the changes of the generations are the forces acting in a specific process (Comte, 1974). In the following years, researcher Karl Mannheim (Mannheim, 1998) conducted comprehensive and systematic research on generations. In his study, Mannheim defined generations as people who share everyday habits and cultures and share these values. Understanding the characteristics of generations is essential in explaining the period's living conditions. However, generational characteristics help understand what age group individuals may need or their problems (Howe & Strauss, 2009). Sandeen defined (2008) generations; as born on specific dates to certain historical events. In addition, they are people who have witnessed or been affected by them and have similar lives or problems due to the conditions of the age at which they were born. The same generations differ from others in terms of living, perception, education, interest and life-related problems.

Technological innovation, a hallmark of academic research, may change how universities teach and students learn (Glenn, 2008). In the 21st-century, technology is a widespread phenomenon in universities. Several factors affecting the generation gap between faculty members and students in lectures are shared, such as characteristics of 21st-century learners, academicians' perceptions of technology, and student's ability to use technology independently. In addition, recognizing generational differences; will provide convenience to people in personal, organizational and social relations.

According to Demirel (2021), traditional education methods are not equipped to meet the intellectual, social and emotional needs of this new student group due to the characteristics of the Alpha generation. Teachers who lack technological knowledge are thought to have severe problems with the Alpha generation. Since the Alpha generation is accustomed to high-speed learning, making random web connections, and processing visual and dynamic information, more online game-based learning will suit them.

There are few studies on the Alpha generation, which has not yet entered higher education. Therefore, this research has foresight about the Alpha generation in higher education. Furthermore, based on such a point of view, this study aims to examine what kind of perceptions X Generation and Y Generation academicians have about the characteristics of the Alpha generation who will be university students in the future and what kind of perception and view they have about their interactions with the Alpha Generation.

Generations in Higher Education

Higher education is considered one of the most promising institutions in terms of the global competitive environment of the 21st century (Arslan, 2019). Because of digital transformation, modern higher education institutions use virtual learning environments for the distance learning processes of students. Virtual environments like this bring new perspectives to teaching styles. Through these methods, which are used by crossing physical borders, remote areas can be accessed, and various educational opportunities are created for those who cannot benefit from these opportunities (Sezgin & Karabacak, 2020). Higher education institutions' culture needs to be changed to prepare for the arrival of Generation Alpha students (He & Wei, 2021). Higher education will most likely involve technology-integrated learning programs and options, far more career-engaging and career-preparation events, and inadequate skill development training and programs in future. The focus will shift from 'transfer of knowledge' to co-creation of knowledge, optimizing the skillset of the Generation Alpha student and their unique acceptance and understanding of technology advances (Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2021). When the studies on generations are examined, five generations are defined. Although authors have no consensus about the same periods for each generation, these five generations are often described in the literature. Examining and identifying each generation's clear and understandable characteristics and differences is meaningful, making future studies more valuable. The four current generations are the Silent Generation (1925–1945), also known as the Traditionalists; Baby Boomers (1946–1964); Generation

X or Generation X (1965–1981); and Millennials (1982–1999). The latter are Net Gen, Gen Y, Generation Me, Gen Net and Digital Natives. A generation is typically defined as being born within a specific birth year range (Schullery, 2013). On the other hand, McCrindle & Wolfinger (2014) defined these generations as baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964); Generation X (born between 1965 and 1977); millennials (born between 1978 and 1992); Generation Z (those born between 1993 and 2009), and more recently, Generation Alpha. According to Howe and Strauss (2009), a generation change occurs almost every 20 years.

Baby Boomers (1946–1964); The Explosion Generation, also known as the Baby Boomers Generation (BB), includes people born between 1946 and 1964, and the members of this generation today are between the ages of 54 and 72, with more than 1 billion babies born in the population explosion that occurred just after the Second World War. Because of this, they are called the *Baby Boomers* generation (Mücevher & Erdem, 2018). This generation is considered adaptive, readily accepting and adjusting to changes due to professional life (Ramadlani & Wibisono, 2017). They work for a long time in one place. To work for a living is a perspective of their understanding of work (Beytekin & Dogan, 2019).

Generation X; X refers to a group that feels excluded from society and enters the labor force only to find that their older brothers and sisters have filled all the positions (Tapscott, 2009). This generation is a very aggressive communicator; they are very strongly media-oriented. The Y or Net-generation follows them. Their number is almost as high as the baby boom generation. Their members are highly efficient in study and work (Kolnhofer-Derecskei et al., 2017).

Generation Y; The Y generation grew up with computer and arcade games, was introduced to mobile phones in adolescence, developed social aspects, adopted flexibility in the work environment and working hours, cared about self-expression rather than a career, took an active role in decision-making (Howe & Strauss, 2009). Generation Y has the characteristics of the generation in which the difference between generations is felt the most. Because they like to be independent, they are fond of their freedom and are different in their business life (Seymen, 2017). Generation Y was born after 1982 and has lived through three historical eras, which could well be distinguished in politics. In our opinion, however, the IT revolution, open borders, globalization and the changes in the education system and attitude have had a much more significant impact on this generation than the political and historical structure (Kolnhofer-Derecskei et al., 2017). Generation Z is self-reliant, contented, fits the team spirit and likes social service activities. They are more interested in actions than the prior generation and Generation Z (Beytekin & Dogan, 2019). The birth of the Z generation has been in the digital world with smartphones, videos, the internet and visual technology. With these features, it differs from other generations, and the current technology is not new to them. This generation is quite advanced in technology and successfully uses programs and tools. They can be much more productive with advanced software and usage programs, and the effectiveness of social media alone will not be enough for them. In general, they have

pragmatic and realistic (utilitarian-utilitarian) features. They are more cautious about taking risks than previous generations (Seymen, 2017).

Generation Alpha is a generation born in the period 2010–2025. No generation is more at ease with online, collaborative technologies than today's young people, digital natives, who have grown up in an immersive computing environment. Where a notebook and pen may have formed the tool kit of prior generations, today's students come to class armed with smartphones, laptops and iPods (Glenn, 2008). Especially for Alphas born after 2010, graphic designs, videos, augmented reality and simulations must focus on a subject and draw their attention to an area. As in other generations, education with the teacher's narration and imagination is impossible for this generation (Turk, 2017). For this reason, they are seen as a completely different generation from their predecessors. On the other hand, this generation, who has not yet entered working life, must receive the proper education to succeed (Demirel, 2021).

Many researchers investigated to understand the characteristics of the Alpha generation. In this study, we present the ethnographic research on the Alpha Generation conducted by Barkowitz (2016), which showed us the characteristics of the Alpha Generation in detail. These characteristics are the followings:

- They want to own everything themselves; they do not like sharing.
- They are incredibly active. However, they do not make noise. Mainly during their 0–6 month period, they were observed to be silent.
- They do not hesitate to share their experience with the world. Therefore, privacy is not necessary for them.
- They do not like rules. They do not even know the rules.
- They are free from all kinds of restrictions and borders.
- They are aware of the importance of healthy nutrition. They especially prefer milk, cheese and foods containing vitamins.
- They have almost no religious beliefs.
- They are very interested in wearable devices.
- They do not like excessive consumption. They like to use their parents' clothes, things, jewelry, etc.
- They are spoiled mainly by their X and Y-generation parents.
- Their X and Y-generation parents influence them.
- They have an entrepreneurial spirit due to their technology accessibility.
- They are self-sufficient. Even though they communicate via social media, they always prefer to be alone.
- They prefer to shop online.
- They rarely make physical contact with people when communicating.
- They are capable of overcoming significant challenges. In addition, they have a high level of competence.
- They can repeat the things they enjoy many times, like watching the same movies and listening to the same music.
- They do not do two tasks at the same time.

- They care about environmental and social problems.
- They live in the moment. They do not think about the future or the past.
- They want everything right away.
- The studies' results investigating alpha-generation characteristics between 2014–2020 showed that Alpha-generation individuals always feel free to express themselves, do not like limitations and restrictions and refuse traditional power (Barkowitz, 2016; Furia, 2015; Jha, 2020; McCrindle & Fell, 2020). Alpha generation is believed to be an essential contributor to the modern world with their ability to critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, creativity and flexibility (Furia, 2015).

Methodology

A qualitative research technique was used in this study. This is because qualitative research is preferred for systematically examining the meanings arising from the experiences of the people who are researched or planned to be conducted. Sampling in qualitative research aims to obtain a specific phenomenon or event that clarifies and deepens a phenomenon. Therefore, all attention is focused on finding the sample suitable for collecting information about the subject's processes. In other words, rather than the power of representation, the subject of the research interest is considered (Patton, 2009). Therefore, a purposive sampling method was followed in the study. Accordingly, the interviews were conducted with the faculty members at Çanakkale 18 Mart University. In addition, this study, which was carried out to determine the views of academicians about the examination of the Alpha generation, who will be the future university students, was carried out as a phenomenology, one of the qualitative research method designs. Creswell (2007) stated that interviews can be conducted face-to-face, one-on-one, and over the Internet via telephone or email. In this context, half of the data was collected face-to-face and half via e-mail.

Study Group of the Research

The study group of this research consists of X and Y-generation academicians at a state university. One of the sampling methods for the study group of this research criterion sampling was determined using the method. The criterion sampling method is based on the understanding of studying situations that meet a set of predetermined criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, participants who completed the requirements of X and Y generations of the academician and participated in the survey voluntarily were selected as criteria. Ten academicians from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University participated in the research. For the participants not to be deciphered, code names such as P1, P2...P10 were used instead of the names of the participants. Faculty members are representatives of the Y and X generations.

Data Collection and Process

Data collection was carried out with a semi-structured interview form, one of the qualitative data collection tools. Open-ended questions directed to the participants of the research are as follows:

1. Is there a need to change the training methods for the alpha generation?
2. Are there training on generations at your university? Or would you like it to be?
3. What are your thoughts on Alpha Generation student characteristics?
4. How should Alpha Generation's perceptions of university students regarding work, communication and learning orientation be?

In line with the purpose of the study, the study was carried out with faculty members. Before the application, permission was obtained from the Graduate Education Institute Ethics Committee Scientific, Research Ethics Committee of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. Interview questions were prepared within the scope of the study. First, a literature review was determined, and the researchers created an interview form. After the document was created, the interview form was finalized by consulting a field expert experienced in qualitative research. In the interview form, explanations such as the purpose of the research and the purpose of using the data were included. The study was carried out with 10 participants who wanted to participate voluntarily. Before the interviews, a pilot study was conducted with one of the volunteer participants. Since the questions were determined to be easy to understand and answer, no changes were made to the questions after the pilot interview. However, typographical errors in the data collection form were noticed, necessary corrections were made, and the interview form was finalized.

Analysis of Data

Research data were analyzed with descriptive analysis techniques. According to Yıldırım & Şimşek (2018), the data obtained in the descriptive analysis are summarized and interpreted according to the previously determined themes. After the data collection process, the data were read several times to check the accuracy of the obtained data. Finally, the texts obtained in terms of the validity and reliability of the study were proven to the interviewed academicians, and the study's findings were presented. At the same time, the participants' opinions were deemed necessary.

Findings

Opinions on the question of whether there is a need to change the training methods for the Alpha generation

Academicians stated there is a need to change the education methods regarding this question. It is necessary for efficient knowledge transfer by the student's learning styles. Participant P1 stated that; *education methods should be updated for the Alpha generation, who will be university students shortly. Academics should remember that this generation is the demographic group most closely intertwined with technology among the generations that have come so far.* Participants recognized that the Alpha generation quickly

understands how to use these devices. It has been stated that applying a legal education to this group of students is challenging. The Alpha generation cannot easily imagine life without technological tools. In addition, technology is essential for the Alpha generation.

Is there a generational education at your university?

Answers to “Or would you like it to happen.”

The academicians participating in the study stated that they did not receive any training on generations in general. In addition, generational awareness of academicians will provide a more efficient and healthy communication environment between academicians and students at the university. In addition, participant P5 stated that *the university should give training and seminars related to generations to the university stakeholders. They said they would participate voluntarily if the educational institution provided such training.* The statements reflect that academics generally draw attention to understanding the characteristics of generations and receiving education regarding appropriate education and training planning at the university.

What do you think about Alpha Generation student characteristics of academics?

According to the views of academics about the Alpha generation, it has been stated that the education life of this generation will be based entirely on technology. This is because the Alpha generation, accustomed to doing most of their work in the digital environment, educates in this environment. Moreover, since they are an entrepreneurial generation, they will actively participate in many different sectors. In addition, participant P7 stated, *The rapid distraction of Alpha children, who grew up among machines that easily access information and understand what to do with simple commands by touching digital surfaces and become individuals who resist their responsibilities in the future. For this reason, university environments should offer them physical and mental activities and the opportunity to have a pleasant time. This generation, who has all the world's knowledge, gets used to this convenience.* The views highlight the need for changes for Alpha generations adequacy between methodologies and technological resources linked to a perspective that understands the universities' processes of change and the requirements that result from it.

What should the Alpha Generation's perceptions of university students regarding work, communication and learning orientation be?

All academics stated that the interactive classes of universities do not meet their needs even for Generation Z. Universities need to prepare for Generation Alpha. So now there must be new digital-type class models. This means that universities must prepare to provide an optimal learning environment for Generation Alpha students by incorporating new technology and learning to use it using best practices. Generation Alpha students emphasize problem-solving and prefer gamification in education. Ed-tech comes naturally to them, and they need it to maintain high student engagement. In addition, participant P9 stated that *Alpha Generation is even more individual than Generation Z. Therefore, it is necessary to have information about individualism when communicating*

with this generation. In this sense, the statements reflect that; when they come to the university education period, the academics stated that the class content should be highly personalized and adjusted to the pace of each student as much as possible. This challenges the academic to maintain classroom cohesion and organize group activities.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

This research aimed to investigate the awareness and readiness of academicians for Alpha Generation as university students. Within the scope of the research, they agree that academicians have general knowledge about the Alpha generation but that an educational environment should be created according to the characteristics of this generation. Academicians stated that changes in study methods and seminars on generation education were needed. Moreover, academicians who participated in the research showed their willingness to have informative meetings or events on the Alpha generation as the new generation may need innovative ways of teaching due to their characteristics and abilities shaped by technological habits. Generational awareness of academicians will provide a more efficient and healthy communication environment between academicians and Generation Alpha students at universities. As the evolution of the Alpha Generation is followed, more is learned about its future impact on the university setting. Prensky (2001), stated that the Alpha generation has high-speed learning, making random connections, processing visual and dynamic information and learning through game-based activities.

Other research findings show that Generation Alpha is characterized as digital native students. Alpha generation education life is based entirely on technology. In addition, Generation Alpha is known to be the largest population of all generations. According to McCrindle Wolfinger's research predictions 2024, Generation Alpha will be the largest generation globally, with several two billion (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that preparations similar to organizing informative meetings about Alpha Generation brainstorming on the possible changes in education style are necessary. Therefore, due to the findings, most of the interactive classes of universities do not meet their needs even for Generation Z when the education needs change for digital-type classes. Therefore, universities must prepare to provide an optimal learning environment for Generation Alpha students by incorporating new technology and learning to use it using best practices (Turk, 2017).

Apaydin and Kaya (2020) claimed that the distinctive characteristics of the Alpha generation included limited social communication due to their dependence on technology, their tendency to work individually rather than teamwork, and their exhibition of leadership behaviors rather than being collaborative.

Higher education will likely involve technology-integrated learning programs and options, far more career-engaging and career-preparation events, and inadequate skill development training and programs (Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2021). Universities should meet Generation Alpha's needs in interactive and digital-type class models. Alpha

Generation is known to be more individual than other generations, so it is necessary to have information about individualism. However, when they come to the university education period, the class content should be highly personalized and adjusted to the pace of each student as much as possible. Universities should prepare to provide an optimal learning environment for Generation Alpha students by incorporating new technology and learning to use it using best practices. It is recommended that higher education should consider the different study abilities of the Alpha generation. Moreover, higher education should organize workshops and events based on digital activities. It is recommended that higher education should consider the different study abilities of the Alpha generation. In addition, higher education should organize workshops and events based on digital activities for academicians.

Furthermore, the authors of this research would like to emphasize that the results obtained in this study cannot be generalized. However, insights from this study can be used to develop questionnaires in future research contexts. Finally, although only a limited number of participants are consulted, generational studies are universal and therefore recommended to researchers, administrators and educators.

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