

Chapter 9

Ubiquitous Learning for New Generation Learners' Expectations

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ABSTRACT

It cannot be denied that environmental influence has a great effect on the characteristics of individuals: reason why people can be profiled with their generation. Generation is a collection of lifespans which fall into a time duration when major changes have occurred. The last decades are labeled as information and technology era where the world is witnessing great changes in lifestyles that go in parallel with the speed of evolving digital technology. Young people born after 2000 are categorized as “Generation Z,” who are born into a world of IT technology and are independent, social individuals competent in using technology and mostly interested in technology-driven/enabled events and devices. Due to this fact, portable/wearable smart devices may be used to offer new opportunities for delivering education tailored according to situational needs and preferences of these people. In this chapter, after touching distinctive characteristics of the generations, concepts regarding ubiquitous learning and how it aligns with the aspirations and values of Generation Z are highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

The major changes that happen over time have a considerable impact on the behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and habits of the individuals. Such individuals, who have been subject to similar life events and who have accumulated similar life experiences growing up, tend to have similar attitudes, beliefs, habits and characteristics. The term 'generation' defines a group of people who are born within the same timeframe and who, generally, have similar experiences. In literature, all generations, past to present, have been classified under 6 titles: G.I Generation, the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y/Millennial and Generation Z (McCrindle, & Wolfinger, 2009; DelCampo, Haggerty & Haney, 2010). Grose (2011) has expressed his opinion on generation as "Gender, religion and social classes may influence you, but it is your generation that defines and distinguishes who you are. It defines your identity". When considered from this aspect, learning expectations and needs of each generation are different. Today, many educators are clearly aware that they need to adjust education strategies according to the needs of the learners (McCrindle, 2008). In order to provide efficient education and learning, we need to understand the new generation's expectations from education and then, re-evaluate our approaches, methods and techniques, and maybe even our learning environments to ensure that they meet the expectations and values of our students. Thus, the real issue is to understand how to handle the complexity of this new generation and to be able to offer them meaningful and creative learning and education tools. At this point, enabling technology-supported learning environments becomes quite important.

Technological developments that have occurred over the years are one of the most important reasons that have caused changes in learning and education. For example, the rise and widespread use of the Internet introduced the concept of e-learning and caused considerable changes on the structure of distance education. Similarly, mobile technologies that have emerged within the last years, allow the users to access information that matches their needs "anytime, anywhere". This opportunity increased the potential of the researches, who wish to advance the quality and prevalence of education, to create new learning environments. At this juncture, development of learning approaches, especially e-learning, m-learning, and p-learning, accelerated. Ubiquitous learning is one of the new approaches that have evolved from these developments. Ubiquitous learning, which is based on the "Ubiquitous Computing" concept introduced by Mark Weiser towards the end of the 1980s, aims to set up a learning process that is constantly in interaction with the individuals and that is geared towards the needs of the individuals (Zhang, 2008). According to Graf, ubiquitous learning has emerged from combination of mobile learning and informal learning (Graf, 2008).

The objective of this section is to determine how well the ubiquitous learning approach meets the expectations of the new generation students (generation Z). In line with this objective, ubiquitous learning, generations, distinctive characteristics of the new generation and the new generation's expectations from education are discussed under section entitled "Background". Afterwards, the findings of the mixed methods research, carried out by the researchers to determine the expectations of Generation Z students from education and how well the characteristics of ubiquitous learning correspond to these expectations, are presented.

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