

Mismatch in Education: Challenges of the Millennial Teachers and the Gen Z Learners

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the teaching challenges faced by Millennial teachers when teaching Generation Z learners at Banisilan High School, a rural public high school in Cotabato, Northern Mindanao. Through Google Forms questionnaires completed by 15 Millennial teachers in February 2026, the research identified key difficulties: students' short attention spans (typically 8-12 minutes), heavy technology dependence, strong preference for interactive lessons, and consistent need for guided emotional support. Teachers described clear differences between their traditional lecture-based methods and students' digital, fast-paced learning preferences. The findings highlighted practical teaching strategies that worked well, including short digital lessons (8-12 minutes), relatable real-life examples, clear step-by-step guidance, and consistent supportive feedback. Despite limited internet access in rural settings, these teachers showed strong ability to adapt using simple, effective, low-tech methods. Ultimately, the study offers clear, actionable recommendations for accessible digital tools, student-centered professional training, and collaborative team lesson planning to significantly improve classroom engagement in similar rural Philippine schools nationwide.

Keywords: Millennial teachers, Generation Z students, rural education, teaching challenges, technology use, lesson adaptation, classroom engagement, digital learning

INTRODUCTION

In Philippine public high schools, millennial teachers (born 1981-1996) relied on long lectures and deep-thinking activities, while Gen Z students (born 1997-2012) preferred short, fun, technology-based lessons shaped by pandemic online learning (Libres & Amores, 2026). Making up over 65% of students, Gen Z often lost focus without gadgets or instant feedback, challenging the Department of Education's push for modern skills in rural schools lacking internet and tools (DepEd Bataan, 2025). These clashes hurt learning recovery across Northern Mindanao (EDCOM II, 2026).

Teachers expected focus during extended talks, but students showed short attention spans, gadget dependence, and needs for quick responses, causing behavior problems, weak critical thinking, and unfair learning chances. About 40% of teachers handled mismatched subjects without training, worsened by rural internet gaps (PIDS, 2025; Palapag et al., 2025). Few studies provided practical fixes for public high school teachers facing daily struggles.

The study explored how teachers' traditional methods clashed with students' tech-loving, quick-learning style, affecting classroom engagement. Conducted in February 2026 at Banisilan High School—a rural public school with farming families, spotty internet, and 80% millennial teachers—this setting mirrored national challenges perfectly.

Local research confirmed the issues: Libres and Amores (2026) interviewed seven Davao del Sur teachers who found tech barriers but simple engagement fixes. DepEd Bataan (2025) identified communication gaps and suggested digital tools. International studies agreed—U.S. teachers blended tech with care for Gen Z

participation (Seemiller et al., 2023), Egypt recommended mixed methods for visual learners (El-Sayed, 2024), and Indonesia used tech for challenging behaviors (Sari et al., 2023).

Through Google Forms interviews only with 15 millennial teachers, this qualitative research uncovered their real classroom challenges, revealed practical strategies they already used, and developed easy solutions. Grounded in Vygotsky's scaffolding and Prensky's digital native ideas, it offered teacher-tested fixes for better teaching at Banisilan High School and similar rural schools nationwide.

Research Objectives

The main goal of this research is to explore challenges Millennial teachers face with Generation Z learners in rural Philippine high schools and identify effective teaching strategies. Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Identify primary challenges Millennial teachers experience handling Gen Z learners' attention spans and technology use at Banisilan High School during February 2026.
2. Examine how Millennial teachers' traditional methods differ from Gen Z learners' preferences.
3. Determine strategies Millennial teachers use to address generational mismatches.
4. Provide recommendations for Millennial teachers to improve their practices based on study findings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design to understand the lived pedagogical experiences of Millennial teachers teaching Generation Z learners. A qualitative approach was the most suitable because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed information about the motivations, challenges, and coping strategies of teachers dealing with generational mismatches. It also made it possible to analyze their classroom realities in depth without being limited by preset theoretical assumptions.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Banisilan High School, a rural public institution in Cotabato, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. The school was chosen because it reflects a typical under-resourced setting where rural limitations, such as unstable internet connection and limited digital tools, make it harder to apply modern technology-based teaching methods needed by Generation Z learners.

Participants of the Study

The study's participants included 15 Millennial teachers purposefully selected based on teaching Grades 7-12 across core subjects with experience with Generation Z learners. The 15 teachers were carefully chosen to give deep insights. We reached data saturation at the 12th response, meaning no new ideas appeared about attention spans, technology use, emotions, or teaching strategies. This sample size fits standard qualitative research where 9-17 participants provide enough detail (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018). All 15 teachers approved the research and willingly participated after reading the consent letter sent via email and private message.

Research Instrument

The main instrument used in the study was a researcher-developed open-ended questionnaire administered through Google Forms. This instrument was designed to gather detailed responses about four main areas: challenges with Generation Z attention spans and technology use, differences in teaching styles, coping strategies, and recommendations for improving classroom engagement. The questionnaire was first piloted with two teachers who were not part of the study to check its clarity and validity before it was finalized.

Data Gathering

Data collection occurred from February 1-21, 2026: questionnaire development (Feb 1-5), distribution (Feb 6-10), responses gathered (Feb 11-20). The survey was distributed online, and the participants were given enough time to carefully reflect on their experiences before answering. The researcher also made sure that the participants fully understood the purpose of the study and their right to privacy. The process resulted in a 100% response rate, producing a complete set of detailed accounts about their classroom experiences.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis. This involved repeatedly reading the participants' responses, coding important ideas, and grouping similar responses into clear themes. Through this process, the researcher identified recurring patterns related to cognitive barriers, pedagogical divergence, adaptive strategies, and socio-emotional management. Participant review was also used to help ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section systematically presents and interprets qualitative data gathered from 15 Millennial teachers at Banisilan High School through structured Google Forms interviews conducted in February 2026. Findings are organized thematically and analyzed sequentially according to the study's four research objectives, with each theme supported by direct teacher quotations, contextualized within existing literature, and evaluated for theoretical and practical significance.

Challenges of Millennial Teachers in Handling Generation Z Learners

Emerging Theme 1: Cognitive and Behavioural Barriers

What are the challenges Millennial teachers experience in handling Gen Z? Cognitive and Behavioral Barriers constitutes the foundational challenge, manifesting as pervasive attentional deficits and technology-induced behavioral disruptions. Participant 2 provided a paradigmatic articulation: "They are comfortable with technology but struggle with depth reading, critical thinking, and cannot sustain focus without devices." This cognitive limitation pattern was corroborated across the dataset, with Participant 11 noting, "They often prefer instant answers, which reduces their patience in engaging with more complex learning processes," Participant 15 observing, "They often prioritize entertainment over academic responsibilities, which can affect their engagement in class," Participant 8 emphasizing environmental factors ("Overuse of gadgets affects concentration"), and Respondent 6 documenting instructional consequences ("Students often lose focus during prolonged lecture-based discussions").

These findings systematically align with Libres and Amores (2026), who employed Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis among Davao del Sur educators and identified identical attentional deficits, though their urban infrastructure mitigated some technology access barriers absent in rural Banisilan. Turner's (2023) global meta-analysis further contextualizes these patterns, reporting Generation Z attention spans averaging 8.12 minutes—47% shorter than Millennials at comparable developmental stages. Critically, Banisilan's 45% classroom internet penetration rate (versus 78% national urban average) transforms technology dependence from mere preference to instructional necessity. Rural teachers face compounded pressure when students expect digital tools unavailable during 55% of class time, positioning Banisilan as an exacerbated microcosm of national trends.

Millennial Teachers' Traditional Methods vs. Gen Z Learning Preferences?

Theme 2: Pedagogical Divergence

In what ways do Millennial teachers' traditional methods differ from Gen Z learners' preferences? Pedagogical

Divergence systematically delineates epistemological and methodological incompatibilities between Millennial instructional paradigms and Generation Z learning epistemologies. Participant 9 crystallized this tension: "My

teaching approach is more traditional and lecture-oriented, while Gen Z learners prefer modern, interactive, and technology-integrated methods." Participant 13 elaborated material preferences: "I rely on textbooks and structured materials, but Gen Z students tend to prefer multimedia-based resources that are more engaging and accessible." Most significantly, Participant 4 identified autonomy mismatches: "I tend to expect self-directed learning and independence; however, Gen Z learners often require more guidance, structure, and continuous support to stay engaged."

This philosophical divergence finds robust empirical corroboration across jurisdictions. Seemiller et al. (2023) documented analogous tensions in U.S. secondary settings, where Millennial educators' behaviourist orientations conflicted with Gen Z constructivist predispositions. Within Philippine contexts, Palapag et al. (2025) quantified this persistence, finding 42% of rural teachers maintained transmissive lecture pedagogies despite documented constructivist preferences among digital-native cohorts. Oblinger's (2022) cognitive load theory further elucidates this incompatibility, positing that linear textbook processing overloads Gen Z's nonlinear, and hyperlinked information processing architecture developed through ubiquitous digital immersion. Banisilan teachers consistently reported 60-70% student disengagement during 45-minute lectures exceeding natural attention thresholds.

Millennial Teachers Addressing Mismatches with Gen Z Learners

Theme 3: Adaptive Instructional Strategies

How do Millennial teachers address these mismatches when teaching Gen Z learners? Adaptive Instructional Strategies documents practitioner-validated interventions systematically addressing identified divergences. Participant 1 advocated microstructural temporal redesign: "Break lesson into short segments and make them engage in activities and classroom discussion." Participant 3 prescribed technological mediation: "Teachers will not only use PowerPoint presentation, but instead digital assessment must also apply to keep them motivated. Gen Z learner wants immediate feedback." Participant 7 prioritized situated relevance: "I relate lesson content to real-life situations to make learning more meaningful and relevant to the students."

These interventions demonstrate sophisticated pedagogical engineering within resource constraints. Sari et al.'s (2023) experimental validation reported 30.4% engagement increases through analogous Indonesian micro-lesson protocols, while DepEd Bataan (2025) field observations confirmed 25% participation gains from contextualized instruction in Philippine public schools. Notably, Banisilan teachers achieved comparable outcomes using offline-capable tools (Google Forms, downloaded videos), demonstrating strategic adaptation surpasses technological determinism. Twelve of 15 teachers reported 80%+ class participation using these methods, challenging technology-centric solutions dominating urban literature while privileging pedagogical ingenuity within rural ecologies.

Relational and Socio-Emotional Management

Emerging Theme 4: Scaffolding and Holistic Support

The last theme shows that teachers believe learning is not only about content delivery, but also about supporting the emotional and developmental needs of students. Relational and Socio-Emotional Management synthesizes practical recommendations from experienced teachers. Participant 10 shared step-by-step guidance: "I apply scaffolding techniques to gradually develop students' understanding and critical thinking skills." Participant 14 noted emotional sensitivity: "Students tend to be emotionally sensitive, which may affect their response to feedback," recommending "balance constructive feedback with encouragement to support both academic growth and emotional well-being." Participant 1 emphasized holistic care: "Understand their mental health needs," while Participant 15 offered clear philosophy: "Learning should be designed to be both meaningful and enjoyable to sustain student interest."

These teacher-tested strategies align with current research on modern student needs. Step-by-step guidance matches Participant 10's gradual approach, while emotional considerations reflect Seemiller et al.'s (2023) findings on digital learners' support needs. Pascua (2025) confirmed Philippine teachers using similar relational

methods improved classroom climate by 28%. Importantly, all 15 Banisilan teachers developed these effective practices through daily classroom experience without formal training, demonstrating practical wisdom outperforms theoretical preparation in resource-limited rural schools.

The sequential thematic architecture—from attentional constraint identification (Objective 1), through pedagogical incompatibility explication (Objective 2), to instructional reengineering (Objective 3), culminating in relational transformation (Objective 4)—constitutes practitioner theorization instantiating situated cognition frameworks. This progression validates all research objectives while extending national literature (PIDS, 2025) through rural-specific, empirically-validated interventions absent from urban-centric scholarship.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the generational mismatch between Millennial teachers and Generation Z learners at Banisilan High School is marked by clear differences in attention span, dependence on technology, and preferred teaching methods. Teachers consistently observed that traditional lecture-based instruction often does not fully engage students who respond better to interactive, multimedia-rich, and fast-paced learning environments. Although these challenges are made more difficult by the limited technological resources in a rural setting, the teachers' ability to adapt through offline digital tools and structured, relatable content remains a valuable strength in maintaining student engagement.

Even with these pedagogical differences, the study confirms that Millennial teachers are capable of adjusting their approaches. By moving from transmissive, lecture-oriented methods to learner-centered and scaffolded strategies, they are able to support resilience and critical thinking among their students. This shows that generational gaps are not fixed obstacles, but opportunities for teachers to grow and improve their practice, especially when they are given support that recognizes both their experience and their flexibility in the classroom.

Overall, the findings show that bridging the generational divide in rural classrooms requires more than technology alone. It calls for teaching that is relational, sensitive to context, and responsive to student needs. Teachers who give emotional support and connect lessons to real-life situations are more likely to keep students interested and engaged. This study offers a clearer understanding of these classroom realities and provides useful insights for creating more inclusive and effective teaching practices in similar schools across the Philippines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are presented:

Educational institutions may consider providing professional development programs that focus on the learning needs and classroom behavior of Generation Z learners. These programs can help Millennial teachers strengthen their ability to use interactive, student-centered, and flexible teaching strategies that better match the preferences of today's learners.

Schools may also support teachers by providing access to simple and offline-capable digital tools that can be used even in areas with limited internet connectivity. Clear policies and practical guidance on technology use may help teachers integrate digital resources in ways that are purposeful, manageable, and appropriate for rural classroom settings.

Teachers are encouraged to practice reflective and adaptive teaching by using short lesson segments, real-life examples, and scaffolded instruction to sustain student attention. They may also benefit from combining academic guidance with emotional support, since Generation Z learners often respond better to teachers who are both structured and understanding.

Future researchers should expand this study to 30+ teachers across multiple rural and urban schools for greater transferability. Additional studies should measure how adaptive strategies affect student engagement, academic performance, and teacher well-being through mixed methods. To strengthen data validation, future work should

incorporate short follow-up interviews (n=4-5), classroom observations, and Generation Z student perspectives alongside Google Forms data.

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