

Characterization, Experiences and Management of Y-generation Teachers: A South African Perspective

Caroline CHAPISA¹,
Shuti Steph KHUMALO²

Abstract

This article contributes to the scarcely researched area of Y-generation teachers in the schooling context from a South African perspective. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the characterization and the experiences of Y-generation teachers and how principals manage them. In its attempt to add to the epistemology on the characterization, experiences and the management of this generation, the researchers deployed the qualitative research approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The results are detailed and discussed under the following thematic strands: Digitally intoxicated and proficient, pursuing commitment, results driven and extrinsically motivated, y-generation relation to leadership authority of the principal and their cooperation and teamwork. This paper is vital in that it adds to the body of knowledge on how Y-generation teachers behave in the schooling contexts.

Keywords: *Y-generation, teachers, techno-savvy, digital natives, baby boomers.*

¹ Mrs, University of South Africa, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa,
59746734@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

² Associate Professor, University of South Africa, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa, ekhumass@unisa.ac.za.

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1. Introduction

Managing employees in the workplace is a challenge to many school principals. In schools, there are teachers and principals that belong to different generations. Each generation has its own characteristics and have various approaches in their teaching (Behrstock & Clifford, 2009). Traditional systems of management may not work in today's workplace as there is a lot of diversity based on age (Armour, 2009). Generation Y teachers may cause problems in schools but may also bring a lot of benefits into the school (Eckleberry & Tucciarone, 2009). These generation Y teachers can be an asset to the education system if they are properly managed. There has been an increase in the use of computer-based information technology in the education system (Courville, 2011). This use has been exacerbated using social network platforms such as Whatsapp, Twitter and Facebook.

Organization including schools experience age differences of the employees, which ranges from young to those nearing pensionable age which is 65 years in the South African context. Principals had to contend with the young generation of teachers who are joining the schooling environment in large numbers. This employment destiny was not first choice of the young generation in the past. These group of teachers have created a lot of controversy based on several allegations against them by the colleagues and those who manage them and in this case principals. Despite the negative assertions against them, there have been sporadic reports of good things that they do in schools. Amongst that is their love of technology which comes handy for the generation of teachers who claim to have been born before technology or who are Techno phobic.

There has been an increase in the use of computer-based information technology in the education system (Courville, 2011). In schools, the use is more on individual level than it is at corporate level. The technology may be in the form of computerised information systems, interactive boards, computers, notebooks, and tablets. Most if not all teachers have access to smart phones which they use to access information and because these devices are personal, the information they get is usually for personal use. This tends to be

true to Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter and any other related media. In South African schools, most of the principals come from a generation which got exposed to computers late in their life (Crampton & Hodge, 2009). These principals manage teachers who were born with technology available to them (Martin, 2005).

The young generation is more self-conscious than ever, it seems that young people are no longer satisfied with fitting in the mould and being told who they are and what they believe in. Bartz, Thompson and Rice (2017) maintain that millennials are driven by information technology, are likely to speak up and assume their opinions will be heard and valued and do not respond well to “because that is the way things have always been done”. Wachowicz (2015) argues that generation Y were raised in a society where self-esteem was valued above all else. They were also told since birth about how special they are and how if they just “believe in themselves” they will be successful. They are also aware of what they want, and they believe they can get it if they want it bad enough (Wachowicz, 2015). Through educational opportunities and social media, they can re-define themselves and choose who they are, what they believe in and voice their opinions freely. This independence certainly affects their work ethics (Bartz et al 2017). Can it be said that generation Y teachers, through their independence and freedom, are negligent, self-serving and in dire need of being managed for them to work at their best?

All these pose a challenge to principals in how they can manage generation Y teachers especially after considering the above-mentioned characteristics. Also considering that most of today’s principals were born before the advent of technology, (Williamson & Meyer-Looze, 2010), and that they use traditional methods of management, many conflicts arise in the workplace.

2. The revision of the speciality literature.

2.1 Theorizing Y-Generation teachers

The term generation refers to a group of people who have experienced the same historical and life events at about the same time in their lives. Breitsohl and Ruhle (2012) see the concept generation

as representing an identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location and significant life events at critical developmental stages. Members of the generation are approximately of the same age when they experience notable historical events such as technological breakthroughs and social events (Rasch & Kowske, 2012). Generational members are born, start school, get married, have children, and retire around the same time in history (Rasch & Kowske, 2012). Therefore, each generation has various attributes, beliefs, norms, customs values and interest and traits that were shaped by historical events experienced at the same developmental stage (Rasch & Kowske, 2012). People in one generation have characteristics and behaviour shaped in a certain way. These characteristics may differ from one country to another depending on historical events in that country.

From a schooling perspective, Behrstock and Clifford (2009) characterize Y-generation as teachers that were born between 1977 and 1995 while Eckleberry and Tucciarone (2009) describe them as teachers who were born between 1982 and 2005. These are the youngest teachers in schools that are currently joining the profession. Most of them are novice teachers who are coming from the institutions of higher learning.

2.2 Dominant and stand out features of Y-generation.

Y-generation teachers are characterized by varied attributes. Research indicates a number of these attributes as follows:

2.2.1 Technology savvy generation

This generation were born in an advanced technological space than other generations referred to as Generation Xers or Baby Boomers. They are well acquainted with communication, digital technologies, and media than the previous generations. This makes them valuable human resources in the school when it comes to working with technology (Deal, Stawiski, Graves, Gentry, Ruderman and Weber (2012). Rodriguez and Hallman (2013) argue that Y-generation teachers have grown up surrounded by the internet, video games and cell phones. They are also called the Net Generation or digital Natives. All these names describe Millennials as technology

savvy and always online. This new generation is the first generation raised on pagers and emails. Martins and Martins (2012) notes that according to Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) research, Millennials view technology as key to socialising and networking, with 85% being members of a social networking site such as Facebook.

In supporting the assertions above, Anold and Yue (2012) maintains that Y-generation grew up in an environment where information technology is dominant in areas of communication, education, and information exchange. They prefer to communicate through emails and text messages rather than use the phone or meet face to face and they use technology mostly for private purposes like instant messaging, blogging, texting, and emails. Anold and Yue (2012) agree that Y-generation teachers are capable of multi-tasking and so can do their work at the same time as they are chatting online with friends. Weiler (2004) states that generation Y have grown up in front of the electronic screens like televisions, movies, video games and computer monitors. They are more liberal with sharing private information online. They also expect to do the same in the workplace. It is believed they spend about 30 000 hours on the internet or playing video games (Kilber, Barclay & Ohmer, 2014). Y-generation teachers are very comfortable using technology and avoid disconnected or technologically inferior workplaces (Coggshall, Ott, Behstock & Lasagna, 2010). They avoid associating in terms of employment with schools which are technologically behind particularly in rural areas where there is no electricity hence the schools lose the generation Y asset.

Martins and Martins (2012) state that generation Y teachers are highly educated and therefore more opinionated, sophisticated, and constantly online, high achievement orientated, highly energised within the team structure. Their technology-oriented mindset can be advantageous to the school and can also greatly be of value to traditional school principals who are digitally illiterate.

Another example is that Y-generation teachers can advise the principals on correct and fit for purpose technology that the school can buy and use. However, they lack experience, soft skills such as relationship-building, communication, meeting deadlines and organisation (Martins & Martins, 2012). This generation

communicate with people globally using technology. Y-generation operate from a global perspective more than previous generations mainly due to ethical diversity and ICT. The internet influence Y-generation to identify themselves with other youth and breaking down ethnic cultural barriers. However, they tend to be individualistic and independent (Howe & Strauss, 2000). By communicating with people globally, they can exchange information, gaining global ideas in their work and this makes them better teachers at the school that can be easily managed by the principals.

2.2.2 Generation Y as job hoppers

Scholars argue that this generation does not stay long in one school but tend to always be on the move, meaning job changing (Arnold & Yue, 2012). This is supported by Lyons and Schweitzer (2012) when they state that millennials show increased mobility between organisations and jobs, resulting in employee high turnover. In addition to that, Martins and Martins (2012) support this as they state that generation Y move from one school to another more often than the other generations and they are not likely to work at the same institution for the rest of their careers. Coggsall *et al.* (2010) support this as they postulate that generation Y do not see any career in which they can commit themselves for the entire lifetime. In addition to that, Qattash and Shra'ah (2017) also claim that new teachers leave within the first three years. However, on the other hand Coggsall, Behrstock-Sherratt and Drill (2011) argue that recent survey research shows that many generation Yers actually intend to make the teaching profession theirs for the future.

2.2.3 Y-generation teachers and commitment

Behrstock and Clifford (2009) describe generation Y as committed, realistic and achievement focused. Contrastingly, Eckleberry and Tucciarone (2009) argue that Y-generation teachers are lazy, selfish, unmotivated, and lacking in professionalism. The experience and the assumption of one of the researchers at the school where she is employed is that generation Y teachers can be characterized as not committed. It is difficult for them to prepare lesson plans and teachers' files. When subject advisors come from the

district office, most of these teachers cannot provide the subject advisor with the teachers' file. If the file is there, it will not be up to date and not in order. When it comes to submissions, they always have excuses on meeting deadlines, asking why things are done in a certain way and not their own way. Professionally they find it difficult to follow departmental policies when executing their duties, for example, marking and submission of registers. They always ask why should they submit registers every Fridays? Even when it comes to setting of tasks, they always question why they should follow the content framework given, use the maximum marks given, follow the percentage required for each cognitive level and also submission of tasks.

2.2.4 Theory undergirding the study.

Herzberg's Two Factor theory was used as the theoretical lens for this study. In this theory, Herzberg argue that factors influencing work satisfaction and dissatisfaction are different and independent (Chu & Kuo, 2015). This theory is suitable in this study to determine factors which motivate and increase teachers' job involvement. Job involvement reflects the extent to which work becomes a central interest in life (Chu & Kuo, 2015). From the hygiene and motivation factors, Herzberg identified motivators as factors that motivate employees to work which result in job satisfaction (Chu & Kuo, 2015). These factors are based on an individual's need for personal growth. The theory states that if these factors are effective, they can help an individual to achieve an above average performance. These factors include a sense of personal achievement, personal growth in the job, challenging and stimulating work, gaining recognition, opportunities for advancement, responsibility, and status. Motivators increase job satisfaction of an employee. It increases efficiency and ultimately helps to increase organisational efficiency. Motivational factors have been identified as rewards or incentives that sharpen the drive to satisfy the wants of an employee.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research approach

In exploring this study on the characterization and the experiences of Y-generation, the qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm was employed. Qualitative studies are helpful when the researcher wants to understand a human phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Through this approach, we were able to gather information rich data through loaded phrases, thick description, and explanations from participants. Mouton (2016) asserts that in qualitative inquiry, the researcher seeks to comprehend individuals in terms of their own interpretation of their world.

3.2. Sample selection, instrumentation and procedures

Data gathering is a critical aspect of research and when it is done incorrectly with inappropriate instruments the entire study is compromised. How data will be collected constitute a serious decision in research. The quality of the piece of empirical study rests not only on the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation, but also by the appropriateness and suitability of sampling strategy and procedure that has been adopted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). As researchers, we purposively selected 4 principals from 4 combined rural (from grade 1 to grade 12) schools. The participants were coded principal PA, PB, PC and PD. In addition, four teachers were also purposively selected and coded as TA, TB, TC and TD. The sample was constituted by gender mix. In addition, the experience of more than 3 years in the schooling environment was considered as criteria for selection. These schools were selected from the rural environment and were all public schools. The researchers conducted face to face semi-structured interviews and fields notes were captured during the sessions. Permission to record the proceedings was requested.

The focus of the semi-structured interviews was based on finding out what characterizes Y-generation in relation to digital or technological interaction, how commitment are they as compared to other generations born before them, how motivated are they in the workplace, do they respect authority and finally do they cooperate with other staff members and are they able to work in teams.

3.3 Data analysis method

This process is a long and tedious one and we followed the processes of Marshall and Rossman (2005) and Paton (2016) wherein we discovered patterns, categories and then developed themes. In doing so, the researchers were informed by thematic data analysis method. The processes followed intensive reviews of transcribed data. Our research positionality never influenced data processing and data was presented verbatim and participants were coded to protect their identities. This research was interpretive and descriptive in approach and there was no intention to generalize the results.

3.4 Credibility and ethical protocol

Before the study was conducted, the ethical clearance certificate was issued by the university for us to be able to go to the field. Permission was also sought from the education department authorities. To ensure that the study is credible, we followed the strategies of Guba and Lincoln (1985), namely prolonged engagement, thick description, dependability and confirmability. The authors also made meaning by ensuring that the findings are compared with literature and personal reflection.

4. Analysis and interpretation of the research data

This section explores detailed description of the thematic strands emerged during the data processing and analysis. The main four themes are discussed hereunder:

4.1 Digitally intoxicated and proficient

During data collection processes, the views of participants suggested that the Y-generation spent most of their times fiddling with technology, particularly when not teaching and sometimes when in class. They also demonstrate proficiency in technology, always online and are usually described as techno-savvy (Martins & Martins, 2012). Regarding this, teachers were required to describe themselves in relation to the characteristics of Y-generation. All the Y-generation

teachers described themselves as techno savvy. In relation to this TA from school 1 indicated that:

“Everything around me revolves around technology, the way we communicate with other people, we have to get information, technology, yaa, we no longer use libraries, now you get the books on the internet”.

In agreeing with the perceptions of teacher A above, PD from school 4 also further commented that:

“Yes, this guys help with regard to technology, they also rely a lot on technology, because it makes things easier for us and them. , when they present their teaching, they do use technology. At some point they do even advise the learners to Google, search information which is part of technology”.

This finding is consistent with what was noted by Martins and Martins (2012) that Millennials view technology as a key to socialising and networking. It is fundamental that schools employ staff members who are digitally literate because technology does have benefits for the school. Amongst others, the benefits include effective administration through the use of technology. These teachers will assist the school in managing the SASAMS which is an administration system that the Department of Basic Education established to ensure that e-filing takes place.

One of the perceptions recorded was that these generation spent hours on technology and this view is corroborated by Kilber, Barclay and Ohmer (2014) who are of the view that Y-generation spend about 30 000 hours on the internet. Further confirming these sentiments, Arnold and Yue (2012) claim that Y-generation teachers are intimately familiar with digital technologies in areas of communication, education and information exchange. It can thus be argued that Y-generation teachers are digital natives and a technologically intoxicated generation.

4.2 Pursue commitment.

Commitment is the backbone of the teaching profession because the main intention of schooling is to produce future committed and responsible adult graduates. There has been allegations and assumptions about the conduct of Y-generation

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teachers in the schooling system. Regarding this theme, the perceptions of both teachers and principals were expressed. The following are the views of the participants:

TA stated that: *“when it comes to my learners, I’m hard working. Yes, yooo....my principal is very strict about that, yaa they always want to check our files, so I make sure that the lesson plans and my files are always up-to-date, even the learners files as well.”*

TB responded by saying, *“Yes I do keep my teacher’s file and I do my lesson plans, like I prepare them for the whole term, and I update them weekly”*.

In addition, this view was expressed by TC intimating that:

“Well I’m a hard working person, I’m committed to my work, after hours like after school, I’m staying with the learners, and even on holidays I come to teach my learners”.

The views of principal participants also confirmed commitment. It was critical that as researchers, we also hear from the principals as accounting officers (school managers) to avoid a situation in which Y-generation teachers present themselves in positive light. The views of the principals in the main confirmed that indeed the Y-generation teachers demonstrate commitment.

PB retorted:

“I was discouraged to appoint these young teachers by my other principal friend from a neighbouring school, but I took a chance and loo, they are two and their presence is amazing and committed, Yes they are not perfect but needs mentoring”

Commitment and professionalism are the bedrock of learner performance. Having committed teachers generally leads to better achievement outcomes, (Henkin & Holliman, 2009). In addition to that, committed teachers put an extra effort in their work, (Meyer, Stanley, Heerscivitch, 2002). Also, every profession has professional and ethical standards that it upholds, and the teaching profession is no exception. From the interviews conducted, the researchers gathered that Y-generation teachers are hardworking and committed to their work. The views of the teachers and principals support literature as Berhstock and Clifford (2009) describe Y-generation as committed, realistic and achievement focused. The findings are in contrast with

the views of Eckleberry and Tucciarone (2009) who argued that Y-generation teachers are lazy.

4.3 Results driven and extrinsically motivated.

Motivation plays an important role in any person's life. It can be extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Generally, extrinsic motivation is doing something because it has external benefits, praise, rewards or because you want to achieve something. For example, in an educational setting, teachers are motivated through recognition, rewarding them or certification. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is personally interesting. Focusing on the teachers' responses, it is clear that they value extrinsic motivation. There is something that they want to get so they work hard.

TC stated that,

"So, for me seeing a child, most especially a black child mastering Mathematics, that is my motivation". He continued to say, *"From the child, also from the parent and also from the school, I do get motivation everywhere"*. He is also motivated by receiving awards from the school as he mentions that *".... of course, because you are being recognised by the outside...."* TB sentiments were as follows: *"I work hard to see my learners passing, that motivates me...., but to see them being something, having a career, having something that they can learn after school"*. TD in agreement with the rest of the participants stated that,

"The department will put pressure, but the motivation itself is to obtain good results at the end and before we did have awards at the circuit level but now, we don't have them, but that doesn't demotivate me at some point because I still want to be known that I can produce 100%".

It is interesting to note the responses of the principals in relation to what motivates Y-generation teachers. PC out rightly stated that:

"They value extrinsic motivation because they always look up to a person to motivate them all the time, for instance, if you give them the word of praise, the word of appreciation and you set targets with

incentives in the targets then they can move mountains for you, because you motivate them in that particular regard so therefore, I believe that with the extrinsic motivation they can go a long way as long as you keep motivating them”.

The data from the study are consistent with other studies in which LeMieux (2017) concluded that Y-generation teachers place important values on extrinsic values, though not necessarily in the form of remuneration. However, in contrast, Breitsohl and Ruhle (2012) argue that it is revealed in their study that Y-generation view extrinsic reward as less important than generation X.

4.4 Relating to leadership authority of the principal.

Schools like any organization have accounting officers who are principals. The education department is represented by the principal in the school environment and had to ensure that teaching and learning takes place. In this theme, different views were expressed in relation to Y-generation response to authority. The following views were expressed during the interviews:

PA expressed himself this way:

“They do challenge me, you see they are divided into 2, they challenge the authority, they said in school A they are not doing what you are forcing us to do, then I keep quiet, then I do that motivation of saying that at the end of the year one who produce good results then I give rewards, then they start changing the attitude, now they are no longer challenging. But now those who come with BSc and so on, they challenge you so much, let’s say this one has a qualification from a university they call a high university and so on and so on, but the others they don’t challenge you, if they challenge you they challenge you Nicodemously, not in front of me”.

This concurs with PD as she alludes to the fact that if they challenge her, they do it behind her back not openly. This confirms the assertions of Deal, Stawiski, Graves, Gentry, Ruderman and Weber (2012) who posit that Y-generation teachers have issues with authority on a number of issues. On the other hand, Deal *et al.*, (2012) corroborate PA and PD who shows that his teachers do challenge authority.

It can be noted that though PC is faced with Y-generation teachers that always challenging the authority, he uses his management experience to manage them. To affirm this assertion, this is what he echoed:

“However this type of educators, yes they do like all the time to be inquisitive, and they will challenge management “so to say management” but actually they are not challenging management, they are challenging the status quo of the system, so you have to work with your legislative framework on board, you do not have to operate by thumb sucking things, so you need to explain to them clearly why we are doing this, what pieces of legislation forces us to do that. If they do understand that fully then they are cooperative, but if you bring any program in the school that is not backed by a circular or by a departmental resolution, that’s when they will challenge that, but if all what you are doing in the institution is backed by pieces of legislation and resolutions then they will flow with you.”

Even though these generation of teachers might be younger, they do raise critical issues. It is therefore important for principals to ensure that the operate within policy framework.

4.5 Y-generation, cooperation, and teamwork

On teamwork, the principals interviewed show that Y generation teachers love teamwork. PA said, *“Generation Y teachers show teamwork as they like working as a school on set goals”*. In supporting and validating this viewpoint principal D posited that:

“Yaa, teamwork, as I have indicated, they cooperate, they really enjoy, we don’t have a challenge of those groups, one vision, they cooperate, they are so committed as I have indicated again, they are very committed, they work beyond target, it’s so impressive, we work as a family because we all have one goal one vision, they are very passionate and supportive”.

In agreeing with the rest of participants, PA also stated that:

“No, I, (laughs), yes they do commit to teamwork, but it depends on how you as a manager delegate them, because if they do hate one person they do hate that person with a passion, you can’t team them up at any given stage, so, therefore you have to be a very wise manager to such an extent that you understand personalities, when

you delegate them and form a team, you try to put together like terms so that they will work and gel even in terms of their understanding and their spirituality and then they give you what you want”.

Flowing from the above responses, it is clear that Y-generation teachers value team work. This contradicts scholars who claim that Y-generation teachers respond negatively to teamwork (Martins & Martins, 2012).

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explore the characteristics, experiences and management of Y-generation teachers in schools in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. This study is important because the teaching profession in South Africa is currently populated by the younger generation. These generation is known as the Y-generation based on their attributes. The researchers deployed qualitative research approach and used semi-structured interviews to collect data from both principals and teachers who were purposively selected. The findings of the study demonstrated the following conclusions: Y-generation are technologically interested, and they demonstrate commitment at work despite the assumptions that they are lazy generation. In addition, they are able to cooperate and work well in teams and also they challenge the authority of leadership in some instances.

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