



Investigating the Local Culture and Characteristics of Gen Zs in Rural Communities: Insights in Improving Students' Physical Education Experience

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Abstract

This study explored the local characteristics of Generation Z students in rural communities as insights to enhance the implementation of the Philippine PATH-Fit program and improve students' educational experiences. Employing a qualitative-ethnographic approach, insights were collected from 20 carefully selected participants through open-ended questions validated by experts. The findings identified seven key characteristics: competitiveness; pressure from external expectations; a tendency to overthink and experience emotional and depressive states; adaptability and cooperation; organizational skills and perfectionism; body consciousness; and a strong sense of social awareness, openness, and risk-taking. The study concludes that these students exhibit unique strengths and challenges. Their competitive nature and high standards are often accompanied by significant stress and self-imposed pressure. While their adaptability and teamwork skills help them navigate changing environments, their emotional sensitivity and focus on body image can affect their mental health. Their proactive approach to societal issues and openness to new experiences make them dynamic and complex individuals. These findings underscore the importance of addressing Generation Z students' strengths and vulnerabilities to better support their overall well-being and success within the PATH-Fit program.

Keywords: Educational enrichment; Generation Z; instructional adjustment; students' characteristics; rural communities

Introduction

There is a crisis of inactivity worldwide, as 81% of young people and 27% of adults fail to achieve the physical activity objectives established by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022). Following Piercy et al. (2018), individuals are advised to engage in 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity,

or a combination of both, each week. The Philippines is the second most physically inactive country globally, with a staggering 92% of its young population being physically inactive. This poses a substantial public health hazard, as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019).

Physical education adopts a proactive strategy to confront this global crisis by providing students with the fundamental knowledge and abilities to embrace and encourage a physically active lifestyle (de Jesus et al., 2022).

By offering a well-organized curriculum and hands-on experiences, physical education cultivates enduring physical activity habits in young individuals. This contributes to improved public health outcomes and mitigates the adverse effects of a sedentary lifestyle (Siedentop & Van der Mars, 2022).

Generation Z, born between 1995 and the early 2010s, has substantially impacted the societal norms, cultural landscapes, and educational frameworks of generational dynamics (Dolot, 2018). Generation Z, or Gen Z, is the initial cohort of individuals born in the twenty-first century. They are acclimated to residing in a world significantly impacted by the widespread availability of information, globalization, and technological advancements (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Cilliers (2017) underscored the significance of understanding the values and characteristics of this demographic for educators, policymakers, and researchers committed to tailoring educational programs to this generation's unique requirements and characteristics.

Generation Z is distinguished from other generations by a distinctive set of values, according to researchers from the United States. This is because they were raised when digital technology was the dominant force, including the pervasive use of smartphones, social media, and instant connectivity (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Their inherent technological proficiency has influenced their communication methods and desire for immediate access to information, interactive educational experiences, and a global perspective (Iorgulescu, 2016). Gen Z is characterized by their practicality and resilience, influenced by their experiences with economic uncertainties, geopolitical shifts, and a swiftly evolving job market. A profound yearning for the inclusion of all individuals, equity, and authenticity characterizes this generation. Their values are rooted in a strong belief in social activism, equity, diversity, and environmental sustainability (Mohr & Mohr, 2017).

Additionally, the current generation's reliance on digital technology may decrease physical activity and increase sedentary behaviors among young individuals. This poses challenges for conventional physical education programs, primarily composed of instructor-led activities conducted in person (Kenney & Gortmaker, 2017). Traditional physical education methods emphasizing outdoor activities, sports, and group exercises are more prevalent in rural areas with limited technology and internet connectivity. However, to effectively address the discrepancy between Generation Z's preference for digital platforms and the traditional physical education methods in rural areas, it is necessary to implement innovative strategies incorporating technology-driven educational experiences, such as gamification, mobile applications, and online resources. These strategies are designed to promote physical activity and well-being among young people while also considering rural areas' unique cultural and environmental char-

acteristics. The PATH-Fit program can create a learning experience that is both inclusive and dynamic while also considering the unique characteristics of Generation Z. The objective of this program is to encourage students to adopt active and healthy lifestyles and cultivate an enduring commitment to physical fitness and wellness.

Nevertheless, implementing physical education in numerous tertiary educational institutions in the Philippines has encountered significant challenges (Junio and Liwag, 2016). These obstacles include deficiencies in curriculum implementation and teacher training, and a lack of emphasis on the subject matter, frequently perceived as having a more significant political significance than cultural significance. The historical context suggests that tertiary physical education has been influenced by factors that extend beyond pedagogical considerations, as per Cariaga (2014). The scholarly discourse on these matters underscores the importance of a comprehensive enhancement approach. Abbasov and Mavlyanov (2019) emphasize the critical importance of enhancing the quality and efficacy of physical education by augmenting resources, such as investing in the development of human personnel and improving school facilities. Physical education subjects are frequently undervalued and given low priority in Malaysia, where similar challenges have been observed (Kilue & Muhamad, 2017). These concerns are not unique to the Philippines. Physical education instructors in Brazilian public schools encounter obstacles, such as deficient facilities, inadequate compensation, and a scarcity of resources (Osborne et al., 2016).

To address these critical issues, the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has mandated that all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) transition to and provide the new tertiary physical education program, Physical Activity Towards Health and Fitness (PATH Fit), as outlined in CMO 39, series of 2021. A proactive solution to imperative matters such as the demand for consistent teaching methods, PATH-Fit is specifically designed to provide a comprehensive and uniform curriculum. The framework emphasizes comprehensive development, fundamental life skills, and physical fitness. Additionally, the program is consistent with the requirements of the current educational system by implementing innovative strategies that can improve the overall quality and effectiveness of physical education in higher education (Peromingan et al., 2023).

The primary objective of PATH-Fit is to surpass conventional frameworks and revolutionize and improve the status of physical education in Philippine higher education. This will be accomplished by implementing a comprehensive program that integrates the development of essential life skills and physical fitness to address enduring challenges. (Velez, 2023). The curriculum's objective of providing students with a comprehensive educational

experience that emphasizes physical well-being, collaboration, effective communication, and overall development is further elaborated upon in the CHED CMO 39 (s. 2021). PATH-Fit endeavors to improve the quality and efficacy of higher education in Physical Education by incorporating innovative methods and adapting to current educational demands. This guarantees that graduates have the knowledge and skills to engage in active social activities and maintain their well-being.

Many studies have investigated the complex terrain of Generation Z, analyzing their behaviors in various educational and industrial environments. Bhore and Pandita (2022) conducted a comparison between Gen Z and Gen Y, discovering that social media has a substantial impact on the career decisions of Gen Z. Ajmain (2020) underscored the significance of implementing effective communication strategies and the influence of technology on the social communication abilities of Gen Z. A review was conducted by Shorey et al. (2021) to ascertain the learning styles, preferences, and requirements of healthcare students from Generation Z. They underscored the significance of incorporating technology and self-care strategies into the education of these students. According to Arkhipova et al. (2018), Generation Z students demonstrate a favorable attitude toward technology in education, which implies that their academic performance can be improved through proper technology utilization. The increased expectations of trust and dependence on social media among college Generation Z students were emphasized by Giunta (2017). This underlines the need for educators to understand and adapt to their students' unique characteristics and preferences.

Furthermore, recent research in the Philippines' tertiary physical education sector has focused on the assessment of the efficacy of existing curricula (Cornel & Ferrater-Gimena, 2017), teaching methodologies (Tanucan et al., 2021), and the overall educational experience (Aguinaldo et al., 2022). The research investigated the impact of technology on physical education, teacher practices, curriculum design, and student engagement (Escomes et al., 2021). The importance of program curriculum adaptability and rigorous quality evaluation has been emphasized by Panganiban (2019). In the interim, Graciano (2022) has pinpointed the preferences and attitudes of students toward physical education to ensure that it is following their requirements. In addition, Lobo et al. (2022) emphasized the significance of student characteristics, indicating the need for innovative approaches to improve the educational process.

Despite a plethora of studies and literature on Generation Z and tertiary physical education, there is still a significant absence of understanding regarding the unique characteristics of Generation Z students, particularly in rural communities in the Philippines. Consequently,

the objective of this investigation was to address this deficiency by investigating the variables that affect the characteristics of students in rural settings. This research contributes to the broader academic discourse by offering valuable insights into educational practices and student engagement. This research aimed to pinpoint areas in the curriculum and pedagogical approaches that could be enhanced by investigating the characteristics of Generation Z. The objective was to establish an educational experience that is more pertinent, engaging, and satisfying. The findings of this investigation can be applied to the development of student-centered initiatives, culturally conscious practices, and customized learning approaches tailored to the unique needs of rural Generation Z students.

By providing valuable insights into the complexities of Generation Z students in rural areas, this study contributed to the ongoing discussion on inclusive and fair education. It served as a foundation for discussions regarding adapting teaching methods to accommodate a variety of student demographics, promoting a sense of inclusion, and encouraging continuous physical activity. Scholars will be encouraged to investigate further effective techniques, inventive methods, and culturally sensitive strategies to improve physical education research by identifying deficiencies in the current literature and proposing a methodology to study the preferences of Generation Z in the context of Tertiary Physical Education.

Methodology

Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative design, specifically an ethnographic approach. Creswell and Poth (2016) defined qualitative research as a method that aims to understand human phenomena by conducting a comprehensive analysis of non-numerical data. Ethnographic research is a qualitative research method that involves the researcher's complete immersion in the natural environment of a particular social group or culture to understand and analyze its complexities (Brewer, 2000). Ethnographic research aims to comprehend the customs, beliefs, behaviors, and routines of the community under investigation through immersion, interviews, and participant observation.

According to Gobo (2011), this method entails comprehensive and in-depth on-site research, which allows the researcher to establish a strong rapport with participants, gain an internal perspective, and disclose insights that would not be apparent through alternative research methods. To gain a comprehensive understanding of culture, ethnographic research investigates the social interactions and symbolic significance intrinsic to the experiences of the individuals being studied (Hammersley, 2006).

This design for research is suitable for understanding the unique characteristics of the local population and its ability to provide an exhaustive representation of the types of students in rural communities. The objective of this investigation was to enhance the implementation of the PATH-Fit program. To guarantee that the program follows the unique educational objectives, cultural values, and interests of Generation Z in rural areas, ethnography was implemented to gain a thorough understanding of the local environment.

Sampling Method (locale, population, technique)

The purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 Generation Z participants as the primary data source for this study. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling is a technique that involves the selection of participants in a study based on specific characteristics, experiences, or perspectives that are highly pertinent to the research. This sampling technique is frequently implemented in research projects that seek to acquire a comprehensive understanding of individuals who possess unique or specialized expertise, guaranteeing that the chosen participants can significantly contribute to the research subject (Tongco, 2007). To be eligible for the study, participants must meet specific criteria, such as being a member of Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010) presently enrolled on PATH-Fit courses and residing in a rural community.

The sample size selected for the study of Generation Z students in the Cotabato Province of the Philippines was deemed sufficient to represent the diverse characteristics of this demographic. The primary goal of qualitative research is to acquire comprehensive and in-depth data from each participant rather than to achieve a broad representation. The selection criteria were sufficiently specific to target individuals with shared characteristics while allowing for a certain degree of variability within these parameters. While the sample size of 20 participants may appear small, it is sufficient to represent the diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds of Cotabato's rural Generation Z population.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument employed in this study was a set of open-ended guide questions specifi-

cally designed to investigate the diverse perspectives of Generation Z students. Participants could conduct a more genuine and in-depth examination of their thoughts due to the open-ended queries, which allowed them to openly and comprehensively analyze their characteristics. Experts evaluated the content and suitability of this set of open-ended guide questions through a validation process.

Verbal signals, facial expressions, and contextual factors that could facilitate interpreting the participants' responses were captured using a camera and voice recorder. These multimedia tools improved the qualitative data by providing a representation of the participants' environment and experiences.

Data Analysis

The Colaizzi Method (1978) was employed to conduct the data analysis and interpretation of this study. This method involves meticulous data reduction, categorization, and abstraction to extract significant insights from participants' experiences. Steps in the Colaizzi Method include the transcription of interviews or data and the identification of essential statements and phrases that are relevant to the research questions. The subsequent procedures involve the extraction of significances and motifs from these statements, classifying these motifs into clusters, and, ultimately, compiling a comprehensive representation of the phenomenon under investigation.

The Colaizzi Method was particularly suitable for this study because it followed the exploratory nature of the research, which intends to understand the characteristics of Generation Z students in rural communities. The participants' experiences and perspectives were comprehensively understood through systematically and rigorously analyzing the collected data. The method's adaptability facilitated the emergence of themes from participants' attitudes, a critical component in documenting diverse and abundant insights into Generation Z students in rural environments.

Results

Table 1. Themes, Descriptions, and Sample Transcripts on the Local Characteristics of Generation Z Students in Rural Communities

Sub-themes	Description	Sample Transcript
1. Competitive	Generation Z students in rural communities are highly competitive, driven by personal goals, and a desire to excel beyond their standards.	• "I'm not really challenged by others, but if I see someone doing better, I tell myself that I can reach that level too." • "I'm competitive towards myself because I always have goals to achieve, and if I don't attain them, I get disappointed." • "I want our efforts to be fully compensated, and I really want us to place well due to the efforts we've exerted."
2. Pressured	They experience significant pressure from family expectations, peer comparisons, and self-imposed standards, impacting their stress levels and academic performance.	• "I realized that even though I was doing my best, I needed to maintain high performance through grade 12." • "My parents are causing the pressure, and I don't meet our family's expectations." • "I feel pressured because I realize that people my age are accomplishing so much while I am at home."
3. Overthinker, Emotional, and Depressive	Many are prone to overthinking and emotional struggles, leading to self-doubt and depressive phases that affect their daily lives.	• "My overthinking still doesn't change anything; it feels like my anxiety is ultimately for nothing." • "I overthink all situations because I fear disappointments, especially in contests I participate in." • "When I'm criticized, I end up feeling self-pity and questioning myself."
4. Adaptive and Cooperative	They are adaptable to new technologies and environments and value teamwork, often taking on leadership roles within group settings.	• "We tend to be adaptive because the things surrounding us are new, and we adjust easily to new ideas or groups." • "I prefer to work with friends or classmates, as I have introverted tendencies but also like to lead and ensure cooperation." • "I want to come out of my shell while leading and ensuring that what I want happens in group activities."
5. Organized and Perfectionist	This group tends to be organized and perfectionist, maintaining high standards and order in their work and environments.	• "I am really organized when it comes to my things, and clutter distracts me when studying." • "I want everything to be organized and my schedule to be well-arranged; it's not about being obsessive." • "I want everything to be perfect, like in activities, and I won't settle for a single mistake."
6. Body Conscious	They are very aware of their body image, influenced by societal standards and peer opinions, which affects their self-esteem and behaviors.	• "I gained weight after quitting swimming and feel that if people don't like my face, at least my body should be okay." • "People or my classmates would say that I gained weight, which was really stressful and made me starve myself." • "Even a single word can really hurt, and when I'm criticized, I end up questioning myself and seeking escape."
7. Socially Aware, Risk Taker, and Open-minded	They are socially aware and open-minded, actively engaging with societal issues and willing to take risks to explore new experiences.	• "I want to be aware of all the issues happening and participate actively in community activities." • "Gen Z has the urge to get involved in societal issues because we want change and are open-minded about expressing our opinions." • "We scrutinize everything for its flaws and are very opinionated, even participating in 'cancel culture' for minor provocations."

Discussions

Competitive. This theme illustrates that Generation Z students in rural communities see themselves as competitive. They often set high standards for themselves, motivated by personal goals and the desire to meet or exceed their achievements. They feel pressure, both self-imposed and from their families, to succeed and avoid disappointment. This competitiveness is evident in their academic and extracurricular activities, where they strive to perform well and improve continuously. While they are driven to achieve high results and maintain high standards, they also emphasize that their competitiveness is aimed at self-improvement rather than undermining others. Based on the research participants:

“...I am also competitive. I'm not really challenged by others, but if I see someone doing better, I tell myself I can reach that level, too. So, in a way, I'm competitive with myself because ever since I was a kid, there's a six-year gap between me and my sister, and I grew up in a household where my older sister was also an overachiever.” – Yan

“...I can say that I am competitive in things like during competitions. I want our efforts to be fully compensated. I am competitive towards others in certain events, like in a band, because I want us to place well due to our efforts. If you've invested a lot of effort into something, the results should be good...” – Nica

“...I am competitive but in a good way; it doesn't drag others down. My competitiveness helps me because, of course, it pushes me to improve. For example, if someone else scores high, I strive to improve my performance. I am competitive, but in a way that doesn't harm others...” – Andrew

This implies that this drive for competitiveness among students can lead to significant academic and personal achievements, fostering a culture of excellence and high performance. However, it can also result in heightened stress levels and pressure to meet self-imposed and external expectations. This intense focus on competition may influence their interpersonal relationships, social dynamics, and overall well-being.

Further, being competitive can positively affect a student's well-being by fostering motivation, improving performance and instilling a sense of accomplishment when goals are achieved (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). It can drive students to strive for excellence, develop resilience, and enhance their problem-solving skills. However, it can also negatively impact well-being by leading to stress, anxiety, and burnout, mainly if the competition is

intense or perceived as a high-stakes pressure (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). An excessive focus on winning can erode self-esteem, create unhealthy comparisons, and potentially lead to negative social interactions or isolation. Balancing competition with collaboration and self-care is crucial for maintaining a healthy level of well-being (Franke, 2021).

Pressured. Another characteristic that defines Generation Z students in rural communities is the significant pressure they experience. This pressure often stems from their families, especially when family members are high achievers. Thus, they feel a heightened responsibility to meet these high expectations. Observing their peers' achievements at similar ages exacerbates this pressure, leading them to compare themselves and feel the need to constantly keep up. This means their pressure is complex, from familial expectations and social comparisons, which profoundly influence their motivation and stress levels. Based on the research participants:

“...I feel pressured too, but in most cases, my parents are the ones causing the pressure. They are achievers, and I don't meet our family's expectations since I have a different mindset. It's tough for me because I was a very smart kid when I was younger, but I lost my grades and honors in high school. During that time, my friends also pressured me to do well and improve. Sometimes, I cry or get angry, but I don't show or tell them I am hurt...” – Benjamin

“...I can assess that I am pressured, especially by peer pressure, because I realize that people my age are accomplishing so much while I am at home, always on my phone. So, I feel pressured, even though my family isn't pressuring me; it's just me pressuring myself...” – Kitchie

“...As a Gen Z, I feel pressured because, among my siblings, I'm not as focused on academic work. That's why I'm always reminded to take my studies seriously. It's hard to face people because they will still have something to say even if we're not doing anything. That's why it's difficult to face them, which is why I immediately cut off toxic people...” – Christmas

The implication of the pressure experienced by Generation Z students in rural communities is that it can significantly impact their mental health and emotional well-being. The constant need to meet familial and social expectations can lead to heightened anxiety, stress, and a fear of failure. This pressure might drive them to overexert themselves, potentially leading to burnout and decreased overall life satisfaction. Additionally, the comparison with peers can foster a competitive

environment that may strain friendships and hinder collaborative efforts.

Furthermore, Cai et al. (2019) explained that pressure significantly influences students' mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Under pressure to perform academically, socially, or in extracurricular activities, students may experience heightened stress and anxiety, which can impair their ability to concentrate, learn, and retain information (Mao et al., 2019). This pressure can lead to burnout, decreased motivation, and a sense of overwhelm, impacting their overall mental health. Additionally, it can strain relationships with peers and family and reduce participation in enjoyable or relaxing activities. Prolonged pressure without adequate support and coping mechanisms can negatively affect students' well-being and academic performance (Evans et al., 2020).

Overthinker, Emotional, and Depressive. This theme highlights that Generation Z students in rural communities often see themselves as overthinkers, emotional, and prone to depressive states. According to the research participants, they tend to overthink to avoid repeating past mistakes and mitigate the fear of disappointment. This overthinking is accompanied by heightened emotional sensitivity, especially when faced with disappointments from themselves or others. This means that their tendency to overthink is closely tied to their emotional and mental health, leading them to experience significant stress and emotional turmoil when expectations are not met. According to them:

"... we are overthinkers because we don't want the same mistakes to happen as before due to our carelessness. Although some people are overthinkers because it leads them to take preventive measures, my overthinking still doesn't change anything for me. It feels like my anxiety is ultimately for nothing ..." – Tamz

"... I am also an overthinker, and I overthink all situations because I fear disappointments. For example, I overthink what would happen if I didn't answer correctly in the contests I participated in. This might also be due to my upbringing, as my mom is very strict and always expects me to excel ..." – Bryan

"... As Gen-Z, we tend to be emotional, like experiencing depressive phases. When we face disappointments, we often find ways to prove ourselves to ourselves ..." – Bogart

This denotes that the combination of traits can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and a heightened vulnerability to mental health issues such as depression. Their tendency to overthink can worsen emotional distress and create

a cycle of negative thinking, which can hinder their academic performance and personal growth. Additionally, their emotional sensitivity might affect their relationships and social interactions, potentially leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Moreover, overthinking can significantly impact a student's well-being and contribute to depression by creating a cycle of persistent worry and self-doubt. When students constantly reflect on their mistakes, future uncertainties, or potential outcomes, it can lead to heightened anxiety, stress, and feelings of inadequacy (Lane et al., 2020). This constant mental strain can worsen symptoms of depression, such as persistent sadness, fatigue, and loss of interest in activities. Overthinking can also interfere with sleep and concentration, further heightening emotional and cognitive difficulties (Mage & Langlois, 2022).

Adaptive and Cooperative. This theme shows Generation Z students in rural communities are adaptive and cooperative. They can adjust quickly to changing environments, reflecting their ability to pilot modern challenges and technologies. Their adaptability is evident in their quick adjustment to new ideas and situations. They value cooperation, preferring to work with others in group settings. They often take on leadership roles within these groups, balancing their introverted tendencies with a desire to guide and ensure successful collaboration. This combination of adaptability and cooperation helps them manage various social and academic tasks effectively. Based on them:

"... adaptive because we are born in times that are not traditional, so we tend to be adaptive because the things surrounding us are new. If you look at the younger ones now, a 2-year-old already knows how to use a cellphone, so our generation is very adaptable. They can easily adjust to their ideas or group ..." – Tamz

"... we are cooperative because I prefer to work with friends or classmates since I have some introverted tendencies, so I want to come out of my shell while having characteristics where I like to lead and ensure that what I want happens. So, I want to know if there are activities we can cooperate on, and I can lead ..." – Snow

This indicates that their adaptability allows them to quickly learn and utilize new technologies, which can enhance their academic and professional skills. Their cooperative nature fosters teamwork and collaboration, which is valuable in educational and work environments. However, their reliance on digital tools and tendency to work in groups might also influence their ability to solve

problems independently or engage in more traditional, less collaborative tasks.

Additionally, being adaptive and cooperative can significantly benefit students in their future jobs by enhancing their ability to navigate and thrive in diverse and changing work environments (Schreiner et al., 2020). Adaptability allows them to embrace new challenges, learn new skills, and adjust to different roles and expectations, making them valuable assets to employers (Burns, 2020). Mobolade et al. (2021) state that cooperation fosters strong teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills, which are essential for collaborative projects and building positive workplace relationships. These traits help students become versatile, reliable, and effective employees who can contribute to a harmonious and productive work culture.

Organized and Perfectionist. This theme shows that Generation Z students in rural communities view themselves as highly organized and perfectionist. They feel strongly about keeping their surroundings tidy and well-arranged. Clutter and disorganization can distract them and hinder their focus, especially in shared living spaces like boarding houses. They prefer to manage their time effectively and maintain a structured environment. They hold high standards for their work and activities, striving for perfection and not settling for any mistakes, no matter how small. This desire for order and flawlessness drives them to handle everything precisely and efficiently. As they said:

“... I am organized regarding my things, etc. Especially in the boarding house, if I see a mess, my mind gets confused when I see it. When I see clutter, I get distracted when studying and sometimes can't regain my focus. In the boarding house, I have co-tenants, and sometimes, when I can't take it anymore, I just don't look at it or go outside. I put the table outside and study there so I don't get distracted inside ...” – Yan

“... as a Gen Z, I am organized because I hate it when other people are messy and careless. I want everything to be organized and to manage my time wisely. It's not about being obsessive, but I want things to be orderly and my schedule well-arranged ...” – Ela

“... I am also a perfectionist. Very much so. I want everything to be perfect, like in activities, 100/100, and I won't settle for a single mistake because it's a waste if there are even minor errors ...” – Snow

This entails their strong organizational skills and attention to detail, which can lead to high-quality work and efficient management of tasks. However, their pursuit of perfection and dislike of mistakes may also create stress

and a fear of failure, potentially affecting their mental health and ability to handle unexpected challenges. This high level of self-expectation can impact their overall well-being and may influence their interactions with others, particularly in collaborative settings where flexibility and adaptability are required.

Fathurrahman (2020) also explained that being organized and a perfectionist can positively impact students in their future jobs by helping them manage tasks efficiently, meet deadlines, and produce high-quality work. Organizational skills enable them to prioritize effectively, maintain order, and increase productivity, which are highly valued in any professional setting (Vreeker-Williamson et al., 2024). However, perfectionism can also have adverse effects, such as causing undue stress, delaying task completion due to excessive attention to detail, and fostering a fear of failure (Zucker, 2022). This can lead to burnout and hinder adaptability in dynamic work environments. Balancing organizational skills with realistic expectations and flexibility is crucial for long-term career success and well-being (Helmerts, 2020).

Body Conscious. This theme highlights that Generation Z students in rural communities are very aware of their bodies and how others perceive them. They feel pressure to maintain a particular body image, often influenced by other people's opinions. Negative comments about their weight or appearance cause stress and lead them to take actions like dieting or avoiding social interactions. Being body conscious is essential because they believe it affects how others define and perceive them. This awareness and sensitivity to body image significantly impact their self-esteem and behaviors. Based on their responses:

“... I'm body conscious. For example, since grade 6, people or my classmates would say I gained weight. Then it was stressful because their opinions were very stressful so that I would starve myself every night...” – Kitchee

“... and before, I was conscious, which affected me. Like before, they thought I was an attention-seeker, but I wasn't; I was just being natural. I stopped paying attention to my classmates because they gossiped about me...” – Namikazee

This conveys that their self-esteem and mental health are closely tied to their physical appearance. This heightened awareness and sensitivity to body image can lead to stress and anxiety, influencing their daily behaviors and social interactions. Their efforts to conform to perceived body standards may result in unhealthy practices, such as restrictive dieting or social withdrawal. This focus on body image can also affect their academic performance

and participation in activities, as their concern about appearance might overshadow other aspects of their lives.

Consequently, youths today are highly conscious about their bodies as a form of self-validation due to the pervasive influence of social media, societal standards, and peer pressure (Akbaş, 2020). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat often emphasize physical appearance and perpetuate idealized body images, leading young people to equate their self-worth with how closely they match these standards (Nazworth, 2022). This constant exposure can create a strong desire for external validation through likes, comments, and followers, driving them to focus on their appearance (Pruett, 2024). Additionally, societal norms and peer comparisons can amplify these feelings, making body consciousness a significant aspect of their self-identity and self-esteem (Merino et al., 2024).

Socially Aware, Risk Taker, and Open-minded. This theme describes Generation Z students in rural communities as highly aware of societal issues. They actively seek to stay informed and involved, not wanting to ignore essential matters. Their awareness drives them to participate in community activities and speak out on issues they care about. They are also willing to take risks by stepping out of their comfort zones to explore new experiences and challenges. This generation values open-mindedness, expressing their opinions and standing by their beliefs while respecting different perspectives. Their social awareness and willingness to take risks reflect a desire for change and a proactive approach to life. To wit:

“...Gen Z stands up for issues and is open-minded. We have words to say based on what we see. If there’s an issue, I speak or take a stand—not to the extent of joining rallies outright, but I have my standpoint. I know where I stand and what I believe. I can make comments and stand by them. I think Gen Z has the urge, a strong desire to get involved in societal issues because we are aware of what’s happening around us, and we want change...” – Bebe

“...Perhaps, as Gen Z, we are involved in societal issues. We notice that some of us are socially aware, but not to the extent of joining rallies, though we respect others who do. But Gen Z today is very opinionated and open-minded. Even for small things, we scrutinize everything for its flaws. There’s this “cancel culture” trend at the slightest provocation...” – AJ

This indicates that being socially aware, risk-takers, and open-minded means they will likely be proactive agents of change in their communities. Their awareness of societal issues drives them to engage in community

activities and advocate for causes they believe in, potentially leading to positive social impact and progress. Their willingness to take risks and embrace new challenges suggests a readiness to innovate and adapt, which can contribute to personal growth and community development. Their open-mindedness fosters a culture of respect and inclusivity, encouraging diverse perspectives and collaborative problem-solving.

Students today are socially aware and risk-takers due to their exposure to diverse perspectives and information through digital media and global connectivity. This awareness of social issues such as climate change, inequality, and social justice drives them to be more conscious of their actions and their impact on the world (Wilks et al., 2020). Additionally, McHaney (2023) said that the rapid pace of technological and cultural change encourages them to take risks, experiment, and innovate, seeing these actions as necessary for progress and personal growth. Their willingness to challenge the status quo and engage with complex issues reflects a dynamic and proactive approach to shaping their future (Wucker, 2021).

Conclusions

This study concludes that Generation Z students in rural communities are marked by a strong competitive drive, often fueled by personal ambitions and external pressures, leading to significant self-imposed stress and high expectations. Their adaptability and cooperative nature enable them to thrive in changing environments and work effectively in team settings, while their organizational skills and perfectionism push them toward achieving high standards. Despite their strengths, they also face challenges such as overthinking, emotional sensitivity, and body consciousness, which can impact their mental health and self-perception. Their social awareness, openness to new experiences, and willingness to take risks reflect a proactive approach to personal growth and societal involvement, highlighting their dynamic and complex characteristics.

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