THE G.E.T CONCEPTUAL MODEL: TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR MILLENNIALS

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Abstract

The Malaysian Millennials are no different from Millennials in other parts of the world. They are brought up in the era of rapid technological changes and they are constantly in touch with the various virtual communities of the world who have interesting ways of learning new ideas. As such, they are challenging the current methods of classroom engagement, which many find are outdated and less than stimulating. The Millennials do not want to be sitting passively in the classrooms, listening to boring, one-way communication lectures. They want to be active participants in the learning process. This paper introduces a the G.E.T (Group work, Hands-on Learning, Technology) conceptual model which aims to help academics transform their teaching and learning environment to suit the Malaysian Millennials taste for acquiring new information and knowledge.

Keywords: Millennials, Higher Education Institutions, Pedagogy, Learning Styles, Group-work, Hands-on Learning, Technology, G.E.T Model, Teaching and Learning Environment

INTRODUCTION

This is the age of virtual reality. Nothing is the same anymore. A flying car? A hover board? A flipped classroom? That's even possible in this 21st Century. As the world is evolving with the rapid growth of technology, making the globe borderless, and access to everything is just a click away, graduates today, too, own a different set of qualities than the previous generations. They,

Generation Y (Gen Y) and Gen Z, also referred to as the Millennials or Digital Natives, who grow up in this borderless world, invest their lives, if this could be said, wholly, to the rise of the "dot com" era. They have no memory of the pre-Internet history, or if otherwise, very few and obsolete, also irrelevant.

As explained by Prensky (2001) in Wisniewski (2010), the young people who were born during the 1980s are called Millennials. There are also other labels for them, such as the Digital Natives. They live in an environment that is characterised by fast moving, ever-evolving and hi-tech. Therefore, the way they communicate, live and learn is absolutely distinctive than how the Baby Boomers and Gen X did.

The Millennials are familiar with playing video games and texting messages since they were babies and this has made them to be against one way communication lectures, as well as the old way of being examined. They want constant excitement and challenges (Black, 2010, as reported in Paul, 2014). The Millennials, who grow up with computers, the Internet, handphones, music players, among others, suggest that the use of paper-pencil style is not relevant and significant anymore in delivering education to them. In this case, where the delivery of education is considered outdated and clashes with the learning styles of the Millennials, it needs, as a whole, to be diagnosed, in order to see a well-developed society receiving timely instruction to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Specifically, in leadership and entrepreneurship management courses, theories and concepts are the core elements in these subjects. Thus, it is imperative for the topics to "come alive" in order that Millennial learners are able to easily grasp non-concrete information and learn the ways to apply the information in real-life (Paul, 2014). The curriculum needs to engage the learners through the emphasis of interaction, participation and increased commitment.

Hence, it is proposed that through group works, experiential, hands-on activities and technology-based approaches, the learners could engage better to effectively learn the subject-matter.

This paper aims to introduce the G.E.T conceptual model which the researcher has formed through a thorough study of the literature on the traits of the Millennials. The G.E.T (Group work, Hands-on Learning, Technology) conceptual model categorises effective learning through Groupwork, Experiential, Hands-on Approach and Technology friendly environment. The G.E.T (Group work, Hands-on Learning, Technology) conceptual model is introduced to assist academics to craft teaching and learning strategies to ensure that the Millennials enjoy effective teaching and learning environment at a private university of Leadership and Entrepreneurship in Malaysia.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is a basic need. It is through education that a society defines itself whether it has evolved from the old way of life or still developing itself. As defined by Smith (2015), education is a way of learning the various capabilities and realities in life. It is a procedure to inspire and unearth new realms. According to John Dewey (1916) education is – "a process of living and not a preparation for future living". From this backdrop, academics need to work "with" people rather than "on" them. The mission of academics is "educe" (similar to the Greek idea of educere) and as such, academics must work to foster growth in their learners.

Definitely, the way education is served is different now and has advanced for the current generation. The previous generation, the Baby Boomers, of course learned through a more traditional style compared to the "techno" Gen Y and Gen Z. The Boomers were so used to chalkboards, rotary phones, memorisation of trivia, encyclopaedias and interaction with neighbourhood friends, while today's youth are so occupied with online classes, SMART Boards, iPhones, Wikipedia and Facebook friends (Wisniewski, 2010).

The world is evolving, and education too needs to transform to engage meaningfully with the current generation of Millennials. In Malaysia, the education sector is currently in its transformation phase where a number of transformation plans are in the execution stage at all levels – primary to secondary and tertiary – in support to cater to the changing needs of the current generation. The transformation plans include the revamp of the primary and secondary school syllabus, the inclusion of vocational education for secondary school, the introduction of the new National Education Blueprint to guide the sector, the appearance of research universities as well as APEX university to conduct studies to upgrade the education system, the amendment of several education Acts, the announcement of the integrated cumulative grade point average (iCGPA) system, among others.

All these are in line with the growing population of the Millennials who demand highly of education that serves their very way of life, in order to function at a maximum potential as a balanced society.

As this paper is focusing on the evolution of education at the tertiary level, a discussion on higher education in Malaysia is explored to give a clear picture of how Malaysian Higher Education sector can help the Millennials learn effectively in order to be better leaders of tomorrow. Following the background of higher education in Malaysia are the discussion on the performance of the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, the explanation on Millennials, pedagogy and learning styles, as well as the review of the benefits of group work, experiential learning and technology friendly lessons to help stakeholders see the courses of the rapidly changing education to engage with the demands of the future leaders.

Malaysian Higher Education

Malaysian sector in charge of higher education is seen paving its way to meet the demands of the Millennials, despite the slow pace. According to StudyMalaysia.com (2014), the establishment of the higher education section in Malaysia was on 27 March 2014. It is governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Its establishment signalled the expansion of Malaysian higher education following the idea of the Malaysian government to make the country an excellent international educational hub.

MOHE is formed with the mission to form an environment of higher education that is suitable for the advancement of both academic and institution. Another dream that MOHE wants to achieve is to produce Malaysians who are skilful, inventive and with high moral values who will contribute to nation-building and to the world at large. Its many functions include formulating the administration and leadership of the higher education sector, developing the sector to empower the nation to compete globally, and dealing with challenges of the global economic scene in producing knowledgeable human resource with high moral standards, among others.

MOHE is paying attention to five main domains which are to formulate an overall step by step tactics for higher education, to boost the system of higher education management, to expand the dimension, receptiveness and attendance in higher education, to bolster the parameters of higher education and to internationalise Malaysian higher education.

Figure 1: Malaysia Economic Reforms

Malaysian Higher Education has undergone revamps for the past few decades. The revamps were the effects of globalisation in higher education. Malaysian higher education has made its shift from agricultural-based economy and industrial-based one to knowledge-based economy where the markets fight for the "best brains"(Singh et al., 2010). The current revamp has seen the fulfilment of the National Higher Education Blueprint which emphasizes 10 Shifts to the sector namely Shift 1-10: Holistic, Entrepreneurial and Balanced Graduates, Talent Excellence, Nation of Lifelong Learners, Quality TVET Graduates, Financial Sustainability, Empowered

Governance, Innovation Ecosystem, Global Prominence, Globalised Online Learning, and Transformed Higher Education Delivery respectively.

As globalisation takes place in the Malaysian higher education sector, transformation of the system can be seen in several aspects spanning from the privatization of institutions of higher learning, the increase of capacity into public colleges and universities, and the adoption of the system of foreign universities to the increase of international students.

Performance of Malaysian Higher Education Institutions

Despite the lavish selections of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the issue of quality is still in the air. Malaysian public universities have dropped in the Times Higher Education (THE) University Rankings over the last few years (Hunter, 2016). According to the rankings, no Malaysian university made it to the top 100 Asian rankings.

A local daily reported that a representative of THE said that Malaysian universities did not perform strongly to be ranked. In general, Malaysia's universities receive quite low scores for reputation and also for citations (Shukry, 2015). Therefore, this implies that Malaysian universities have lost noticeable ground in academic reputation and tend to be weak in research. The university rankings explained above signifies the poor quality of education received recently by the students. This might be attributable to the fact that the current batches of clients of these universities are the Millennials, who have a very different perspective of education as well as contrasting personalities and styles of learning which clash with what is served to them, resulting in poor performance at the tertiary level.

The New Client: The Millennials

As the world is evolving years after years, decades over, generations have also shifted in many ways. The Millennials are now seen thronging the higher education institutions. Thus, the ways in approaching this new set of clients need to be updated through various means especially from the point of view of their effectiveness in order to meet the demands.

The previous generations carry a totally different set of traits. The Boomers were those born between the years 1945-1965, while the Gen X were born between 1965-1976 (Schroer, n.d.), and if building own family started at an average age of 20, their children now would have grown into those who are now starting to enter the higher education institutions or are already studying at the tertiary level. On the other hand, the Gen Y and Gen Z, characterised as the Millennials, were those born between the years 1977-1994 and 1995-2012 respectively (Schroer, n.d.) and are those who are currently pursuing their post-secondary education. The Millennials are clearly operating in a way contrasting strongly with the Boomers and Gen X.

With technology, the Millennials are comfortable with doing many tasks at one time by using a variety of digital media and this forces them to be active participants in the process of creating new concepts (Reeves, 2008, as reported in Wisniewski, 2010).

Everything is different compared to their predecessors. Today's youth are independent, inclusive (global and virtual communities), opinionated and aware, investigate technologically and expecting immediacy (information at light speed) in all events (Lippincott, 2010, as stated in Gardner & Aleksejuniene, 2011).

According to a study by Wilson & Gerber (2008), the Millennials are recognised as being confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, special and sheltered, which are different from the Boomers and Gen X. So, clearly the different traits of the generations shall bring education to a brand new perspective. The Millennials, again, are in dire need of a different education environment from the Boomers to function, learn and work well while developing themselves into better leaders of tomorrow.

Pedagogy and Learning Styles

In providing different learning experiences to the new clients of the higher education institutions, there is a need to examine the pedagogy used by the academics as well as the learning styles of the learners, in this case, the Millennials.

According to Smith (2012), pedagogy is the process of accompanying learners; caring for and about them; and bringing learning into life. Teachers or educators in general need to know the effective ways on how to motivate learners to learn for life. Coffield et al. (2004) stated that life-long learning happens when the learners are motivated to learn and this is possible when they know their strengths and weaknesses, while the educators respond closely to this need. Thus, achievement rates are likely to rise. It is believed that the knowledge of pedagogy is deem crucial in determining the performance of the learners, and academics who tailor instruction to learners' learning styles are said to be able to keep an upward trend of attainment (Glonek, 2013).

According to Langlois et al.,(2004), there are situations where educators should take control of the learning situation and at other times, they should only encourage the learners in order to assess learners' needs and direct learning. In higher education institutions, the roles of educators are believed to be inclined towards the latter where their several roles may include being facilitators, collaborators, models, supporters, among others.

The pedagogical knowledge is important to educators as different learners learn best in different ways (Glonek, 2013). Learners suffer if there is a lack of alignment between their adaptive abilities and the teaching methods (Coffield et al., 2004). Therefore, educators need to

understand their own teaching styles and learners' learning styles in order to reduce the harm they may do otherwise. With the Millennials starting to congregate the higher education institutions, educators of today need to equip themselves with timely pedagogical knowledge and skills to match the "techno" style of their learners.

Some educators operate with the behaviourist paradigm while others do with the constructivist model. It is the behaviourist view of education that supports drilling, memorisation of facts, passive learning and teacher-centeredness that was used on the Boomers. The role of the educator was limited to the transmitter of knowledge, most of the time, through lectures. However, the constructivist view backs learners playing a more active role in linking their schematas for a more meaningful learning.

Also, through the constructivist paradigm, learning is an active and goal-oriented process which is learner-centred, where the educators create a learning environment, that allows the learners to build their existing knowledge and experiential base.

As cited by Shaw (2009) in Wisniewski (2010), today's educational system is shifting away from the behaviourist view to a more constructivist approach which supports collaborative, interactive, global and project-based learning, that is more suitable for the Millennials. Shaw also stated that a curriculum which uses higher order thinking skills, multiple intelligences and technology should be incorporated in the 21st Century classrooms, be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels of education, where the Millennials can maximise their potentials through collaboration, online courses and assessments, blogs, learner-centred lessons, to name a few.

The Millennials, as a whole, prefer experiential learning where hands-on and active participation are offered abundantly. This generation wants to be able to apply the skills and techniques learn directly to real-life settings as it would eliminate the thought of wondering "why do we learn what we learn". It is believed that if educators use old style of teaching, the learners will eventually "shut down". Hence, there is a compelling urge for educators to update themselves with the ways the Millennial learners best learn and function.

From a survey done in a study by Wisniewski (2010), it is outlined below on how the Millennials prefer their learning to be:

- Group work and simulations that require a leader to step forward
- Assignments directly applicable to the real-world settings
- Apprenticeship, internships: Shadow a leader or be paired with a mentor
- Teach real-life ideas and ways to handle things. Do not focus so much on events that happened many years ago, but rather on events that have happened recently or on events that are in the making

- Interaction and class involvement: Allowing the opportunity to see the opinions of numerous people

- Allow a learner to run a class: A better way to gain knowledge and develop self-confidence, leadership, management, perception and details

- Engagement with the community: Learners would be involved in different organisations in the community, using the skills, practising them and seeing what works and what does not.

Apart from the Millennials preferences of the educational environment, Kolb's (1981) model of learning styles are regarded as essential for educators to understand the ways their learners learn best. According to Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory, there are four categories of experiential learning which divide learners into divergers, assimilators, convergers and accommodators. The divergers are said to prefer brainstorming; the assimilators to have the ability to logically process and organise ideas; the convergers to be practical in solving problems; and the accommodators to be hands-on learners.

It can be deduced from the surveys done by previous researchers that the Millennial learners learn the best through group works and hands-on experiences/approaches which lead to the discovery of the G.E.T framework explained earlier: Groupwork, Experiential Learning, Technology. Given that this generation grows up in the digital world, the last initial from the G.E.T conceptual model, T, which refers to Technology, is derived from the stringing up of teamwork and experiential, hands-on activities with a technology friendly learning environment. Hence, making learning enjoyable and effective to the Millennial learners.

**Group work, Hands-on Learning, Technology (G. E. T.)**

As the Millennials learners prefer more of group works and experiential, hands-on activities, paired up with technology friendly learning environment, it can be seen how these preferences give benefits to their learning experiences and help boost performance.

According to Mellon (n.d.), through group works, learners learn how to develop a host of skills that are crucially important in the professional world. A good team work sparks learner's learning, contributing to greater retention of knowledge, resulting in improved performance as they learn how to develop stronger communication skills, give and receive feedback, refine understanding through discussion and explanation, challenge assumptions, among others, which see and interactive process of learning that suit the Millennials learners' way. This is what learning is to Millennials when they can interact, get instant feedback, and experiment learning strategies rather than the traditional chalk-and-talk approach. Thus, through group works, it is seen that Millennial learners "enjoy learning" which is one of the factors to performance.

Moving forward, the Millennial learners are diagnosed to prefer hands-on learning experiences. They love activities that give them chance to try simulations, or tasks rather than learn theories per se. Experiential, hands-on activities help the Millennial learns learn effectively as they "learn by doing". According to (everest.edu, 2010), hands-on learning environment get learners have better retention of subject matter as they practise what they are learning, give learners as better feel of the real world application, stimulate them to learn as much as possible through the empowerment of the challenging task, and leverage problem-solving, decision-making and critical-thinking skills as they do not rely on attention and memory but through understanding of the whole subject matter. This is what defines learning to them, not the drilling and memorisation and trivias indeed.

The two activities, group works and experiential, hands-on tasks, when paired with technology friendly learning environment, would hike student's engagement in learning. With the inclusion of gadget-based lessons, students find learning more fun, thus enjoying it and performing better. Lessons, which incorporate videos from YouTube, game simulations, creation of Avatars, Twitter conversation, Google apps (Murray, n.d.), to name a few, would see learners' engagement to the lessons, hence ensuring a more enjoyable and effective learning that guarantees performance. In can be summarised that group works, experiential, hands-on activities and a technology friendly classroom give a number of benefits that hike student's interest towards the lessons, thus improving learning and academic attainment. Figure 2 below shows the G.ET Conceptual Model for a more effective and enjoyable teaching and learning environment for Millennials learners.

Figure 2: The G.E.T Conceptual Model
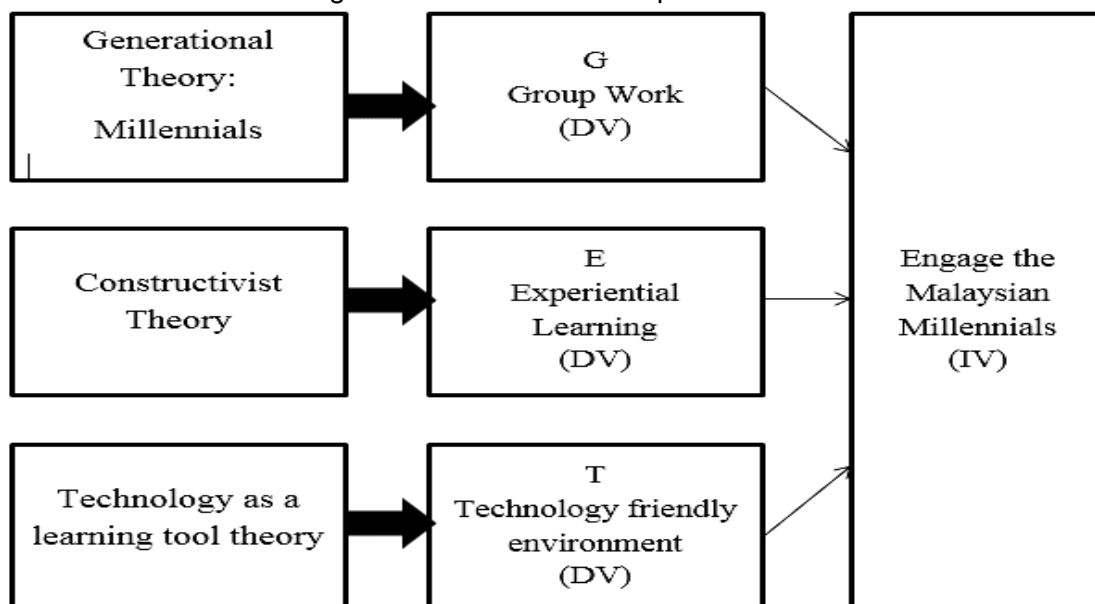
Summary

The G.ET conceptual model is designed based on the review of the extensive literature related to the latest generation of young people dubbed the Millennials who are the major clients at universities and colleges all around the world. The Millennials are also referred to as Digital Natives since they are born in the era of technological sophistication. Millennial learners want more than just boring, one way communication classroom engagement. They want to be active participants in the learning process of teaching and learning propose that all teaching and learning assignments should include group work, experiential, hands-on activities and a technology friendly environment to ensure maximum engagement for the Millennial learners.

CONCLUSION

With the vision of making Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) a centre of higher education excellence worldwide, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is seen planning and executing a massive number of transformation plans for the sector to advance the education sector in Malaysia. However, there are several issues that need to be diagnosed internally, instead of looked at, in order to provide better education for the Millennial learners, the leaders of tomorrow.

The issue of access and equity is on the one hand, while on the other, is the quality of the delivery of education. The latter should be addressed in line with the former to ensure a high-quality education for today's youth. The mushrooming of HEIs provide better access to tertiary education but the Big Question here is whether the teaching styles at the institutions serve what the Millennial learners really need in their learning experiences?

It is sadly the truth that educators struggle to understand the characters of their clients (Coffield et al., 2004), in this case, the millennial learners, the way they learn and function the best, while busy following the rigid rules of what can be taught instead of looking at effective delivery for learning. They fail to see from the learners' viewpoints of what learning means to them, and are occupying their time with paper works and administration matters, grading and assessing while almost forgetting that their clients are now the Millennial learners who are self-driven and who only need the right learning environment to function. Educators are needed not for the role of imparting knowledge, but to create a favourable learning environment for the 21st Century Netizens, or Millennials, or more accurately, the Digital Natives.

Further, the National Education Blueprint sees the provisions of 10 shifts "beautifully" being laid down, in order to bring the sector into 21st Century education. Some of the shifts really address the needs of the Millennial learners namely holistic education in Shift 1, the production of lifelong learners (Shift 3), the use of globalised online learning (Shift 9), the

transformation of delivery (Shift 10), among others. The Shifts create a better outlook for higher education in Malaysia, however, the Millennial learners are still "waiting" to be served as the Blueprint is still in the "experimental" stage.

Here, it seems that the learners need to depend much on the educator while the truth is that the Millennial learners are demanding learners' autonomy which they are capable of, with the use of technology. The problem with the education system is that educators are held to be fully responsible, and emphasis is lacking on what educators in the 21st Century should do for a more effective education for the Millennial learners (Downes, 2010). The use of technology to cater to evolving generation should be praised but only as a tool of learning. The use of powerpoint presentations in lectures is a good tool, however, again, the effectiveness of the content delivery is questioned as it still uses the traditional long lectures and textbook-like model (Gardner & Aleksejuniene, 2011). In addition, the upgrade of the assessment system, the iCGPA, which assesses not only knowledge but also the attributes of ethics, leadership and entrepreneurship, should also be acknowledged as a step forward in ensuring the quality of graduates produced. Yet, the very nature of education, which is the way it is served, fails to appeal to the Millennial learners' preferences.

Hence, the G.E.T conceptual model for the teaching and learning for the Millennials is introduced to address the mismatch of teaching styles in higher education institutions in Malaysia with the Millennial learners' learning preferences.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a need to apply the G.E.T conceptual model in an actual course programme at a Malaysian Higher Education Institution. The recommended university courses include entrepreneurship management, leadership management, event management and other management subjects. A longitudinal study is advisable to test the effectiveness of the G.E.T conceptual model of teaching and learning for Malaysian Millennial learners. Another suggestion is also to use the G.E.T conceptual model for university subjects such as information technology, accounting, or even economics. It will be an interesting exercise to analyse the results for these subjects as compared to the management courses which are more subjective in nature.

According to Hullinger (n.d.), the future of tertiary education in 10-15 years will see the disappearing lecture halls, the transforming role of professors, and the value technology will give to make education more attainable than it is today as it moves from being informational to developmental. Indeed, a number of institutions will shut down unless those that are innovative and efficient in incorporating appealing lessons into the courses.

Thus, future research that uses the G.E.T conceptual model aims to give significant impact to the future of higher education in Malaysia, at large, for the production of leaders of tomorrow through innovative approaches in delivering the academic contents. The results of future research will be beneficial to the higher education sector in understanding the factors influencing the effective learning strategies and environment for the Millennial learners.

The results of the future research using the G.E.T conceptual model will also be beneficial to learners and educators in knowing the various learning styles/strategies to better understand themselves in order to boost learning. When they know the various styles/strategies, they will be able to choose their own preferences that best suit their potential in both teaching and learning.

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