

GENERATION-BASED CAREER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS: AN EFFORT TO OPTIMIZE THE PERFORMANCE OF GEN-Z EDUCATORS

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Abstract

Generation Zs, often labeled as "digital natives," are now increasingly joining the education sphere. This generation has unique characteristics, such as familiarity with technology, the need for immediate recognition, and an expectation for continuous self-development. This article sought to analyze how generation-based career development management can optimize the performance of Generation Z educators. The research employs a qualitative method through interviews, observations, and literature studies. The research findings indicate that Generation Z educators require flexible career paths, technology-based training, and supportive, inclusive workplaces. Additionally, factors such as immediate recognition, constructive feedback, and cross-generational mentoring are crucial in motivating them. The findings also suggest that implementing relevant career development strategies can enhance the productivity of Gen-Z educators while simultaneously improving overall educational quality.

Keywords: Generation Z; career development; generation-based career management; educational technology

ABSTRAK

Generasi Z, yang sering dikenal sebagai "digital natives," semakin banyak yang memilih untuk mengambil profesi sebagai tenaga pendidik. Generasi ini memiliki karakteristik unik, seperti kemampuan adaptif terhadap teknologi, kebutuhan akan pengakuan langsung, dan keinginan untuk pengembangan diri yang berkelanjutan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana manajemen pengembangan karir berbasis generasi dapat mengoptimalkan kinerja tenaga pendidik Generasi Z. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara, observasi, dan studi literatur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tenaga pendidik Generasi Z membutuhkan jalur karir yang fleksibel, pelatihan berbasis teknologi, serta dukungan lingkungan kerja yang inklusif. Selain itu, faktor seperti pengakuan langsung, umpan balik konstruktif, dan mentoring lintas generasi menjadi elemen penting untuk memotivasi kinerja mereka. Penerapan strategi manajemen pengembangan karir yang relevan dapat meningkatkan produktivitas tenaga pendidik Generasi Z sekaligus meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan secara keseluruhan.

Kata Kunci: Generasi Z; pengembangan karir; tenaga pendidik; manajemen karir berbasis generasi; teknologi pendidikan

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing industrial revolution has transformed and brought significant changes in the landscape of education, particularly education in Indonesia, toward a more digital-based educational environment (Awalia & Zulkarnaini, 2025; Basroni, 2023). To some extent, the changes have brought some unrests in educational practices. One of the most notable shifts that attracts attention is the increasing number of Generation Z (Gen-Z: born between 1995–2010) partaking into the educational profession (Barhate & Dirani, 2021). A significant number of Gen-Zs started to administer themselves as educators while bringing traits, values, and career expectations that are distinct from previous generations (Basroni, 2023). Gen-Z is known as “digital natives” who grew up with digital technology, possess an adaptive mindset, and demand flexibility as well as rapid career growth (Basroni, 2023; Zebua & Pasaribu, 2025). To some extent, the various traits possessed by Gen-Z can be leveraged in their career development, both in their educational process, preparation for entering the workforce, and skills development in the workplace.

Some studies suggested that Gen-Z educators (particularly in Indonesia context) expect a more flexible and personalized career path (Evers et al., 2016; Fajriyanti et al., 2023). In this notion, some challenges arise when educational institutions should manage and develop the careers of Gen-Z educators in ways that are different from conventional approaches (Barhate & Dirani, 2021). Conventional career management systems, which tend to be linear and hierarchical, often contradict with the aspirations of Gen-Z, who seek more dynamic career pathways, continuous learning, and better work–life balance (Gaidhani et al., 2019; Galinsky et al., 2011, 2013).

The above supposition is proved by many studies, such as Barhate & Dirani (2021), Gustine (2024), Khanna & Dutta (2023), Khusainova & Palekha (2019), which indicated that educational career development systems incline toward more conventional and incompatible with the characteristics of Gen-Z. The findings were reinforced by a study by Zebua & Pasaribu (2025), which stated that most Gen-Z educators in Indonesia considered the existing career development system to be less supportive to their expectations. In addition, other studies reported that Gen-Zs often experienced stress related issue in the workplace; mostly related to their perception of a highly competitive work environment, long working hours, and strict deadlines for completing tasks (Abdou et al., 2024); (Putnam et al., 2014).

On the other hand, some educational institutions are faced with challenges in optimizing the performance of Gen-Z educators, in terms of finding the most appropriate way of handling their characters (Koochi et al., 2022). This generation possesses unique characteristics, such as a tendency toward multitasking, a strong orientation toward technology, a need for instant feedback, and expectations for rapid career advancement (Fernández-Cruz & Fernández-Díaz, 2016; Gustine, 2024; Sari et al., 2024). In this instance, appropriate approaches are needed to nurture a supportive work environment that can accommodate their distinctive needs.

In regard to the above notions, the need for career development management based on generational analysis is becoming increasingly urgent, given that the proportion of Gen-Z educators will continue to rise in the coming decade. Failing in providing appropriate strategies, educational institutions may lose potential talents and experience a decline in educational quality due to misalignment between existing career development systems and the needs of this new generation (Lestari & Susilo, 2024; Nadya & Farozin, 2021; Pratiwi & Salim, 2025).

Albeit the importance of career development management system to optimize the Gen-Z educators' performance has been widely recognized, yet numerous challenges remain. Some of the challenges are the limited in-depth understanding of factors influencing Gen-Zs' career development and finding effective pathways for career development programs (Khusainova & Palekha, 2019; Venida, 2022; Wullert et al., 2024). Thus, a comprehensive study on how to design and implement a career development management system that are based on generational analysis is highly essential. The system should be driven toward optimizing the performance of Gen-Z educators, as well as maintaining professional standards and quality (Galinsky et al., 2013; Hall & Parker, 1993). In this notion, this study aims to delve more deeply into various factors contributing to the form of career development management system that is based on generational analysis, as well as ways of applying it to enhance the performance of Gen-Zs in educational institutions.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative method to comprehend how generational based career development management can optimize Gen-Z educators' performance. This is mainly because the contributing factors of the system lies in an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and practices occurred in the field. The qualitative method enables the researchers to investigate complex phenomena in detail (Creswell, 2007, 2012; Punch, 2014), particularly those related to the dynamics of Gen-Z as educators.

The data collection techniques employed in this study consist of interviews, observation, and literature review. Interviews were conducted with a Gen-Z educator (resource person, will be called as RP_A) and a vice principal at the institution (resource person, will be called as: RP_B). The literature review was employed to examine scholarly journals and books relevant to career development management for Gen-Z educators. Moreover, obtaining direct insights into the implementation of career development programs and the existing dynamics within the Gen-Zs working environment can be carried out through observations.

Furthermore, this study utilizes thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes), to interpret and organize the obtained data (Harreveld et al., 2016; Remenyi, 2012). This approach allowed researchers to uncover recurring topics related to Gen-Z educators' career development expectation and motivation.

Technically, the data analysis was carried out in the following systematic process. Initially, observation notes and interview transcripts were studied concurrently to comprehend the content. Afterward, initial codes were created to extract meaningful units of information. The codes were then categorized into broader themes which reflects similar patterns across participants and data sources. Finally, the categorized themes were filtered and refined to ensure accurate representation of the data and alignment with the study's objectives. In addition, during this stage, the researchers used literatures as theoretical grounding to enhance the credibility of the findings (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Results and Discussion

Interviews with RP_A and RP_B, along with observations and a review of relevant literature, provided the basis for this study's findings. The findings illustrate how generational analysis is important and help align and shape career development strategies for Gen-Z teachers. Based on the gathered data, several interrelated themes were found: (1) discrepancy in career needs, (2) different motivation and work approaches, (3) incorporating technology in the workplace, (4) institutional support, and (5) distinctive generational traits in career development approaches. The emerging themes do not only reflect the participants' experiences but also align with broader scholarly insights. The details and further analysis are presented below.

Discrepancy in Career Needs

RP_A, as one of the Gen-Z educators, stated that Gen-Z has unique needs in career development.

“As a Gen-Z teacher, I feel that having a flexible career development path is important, but it still must be clearly directed. Moreover, continuous learning opportunities, such as digital training or specialized certifications, are also important.”

RP_B's response, when discussing the career needs of Gen-Z educators, supported the above statement. RP_B stated that:

“Talking about career development for Gen-Z teachers, they do need things to support their performance, such as technology training. This will help them better understand and utilize the teaching applications, which are essential for enhancing their instructional methods and engaging students effectively. They may also need some other soft skills such as time management and effective communication. I believe they need a working environment that is not too rigid or strict.”

Both resource individuals mentioned a career development. Further, they emphasized a flexible and clearly planned and directed path. The term “flexible” depicts a certain meaning, in which Gen-Z tends to have more autonomy in determining their career steps.

In addition, they also need a clear direction to highlight their conscious need for guidance and structure to help them achieve their goals.

The above statements also highlighted digital training as a means to showcase one of the characteristics of Gen-Z as digital natives (Fernandez-Cruz & Fernández-Díaz, 2016). It is mainly because Gen-Z are exposed and more adapted to technology and view it as the main tool to further their learning and advancement (Hinduan et al., 2020). This is in line with the results of a survey on Gen-Z career development by Hinduan et al. (2020), cited by Sawitri (2022). According to the survey results, 60% of respondents wanted jobs that allow them to engage in technological development. In addition, 41% of respondents believed that their jobs should provide opportunities to acquire new skills and experience in the workplace.

RP_B stressed the importance of soft skills training, including time management and communication, which Gen-Z greatly requires. Soft skills themselves are a set of abilities related to self-management, interpersonal competence, spiritual awareness, teamwork, information management, ethics, morality, professionalism, and leadership. Soft skills correlate with psychological competencies that enhance teachers' pedagogical skills (Makmuroh et al., 2024), such as effective communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability, which are essential for creating a positive learning environment.

In short, although Gen-Z could be regarded as digital natives, they still need to strengthen their interpersonal and self-management skills because the skills are highly required by Gen-Z teachers to address various challenges in the field of education, which entails them to communicate effectively with students, colleagues, and parents.

Different Motivation and Work Approaches

One important point raised by RP_A is the opportunity to contribute positively to the students and school environment. Gen-Zs tend to be motivated by acknowledgement toward their contributions.

“I expect constructive feedback when I did something good. A simple thank you would be enough. I feel that my work is acknowledged, and I am becoming more motivated and valued. One more thing, I hope that I have an easier access to technology, a work-life balanced environment, and opportunities for self-development. Those things will also motivate me to make better contributions”.

According to RP_B, Gen-Zs have a greater need for recognition and more frequent, immediate feedback compared to previous generations.

“As far as I am concerned, Gen-Z teachers tend to be more motivated when they were directly acknowledged when they made contributions, they don't demand fancy things, formal appreciation or even a personal word of thanks would do”

In regard to both RP_A and RP_B statements which emphasized the presence of recognition either through verbal appreciation or constructive feedback, acknowledgement, and frequent feedback to enhance work motivation, it is important to consider the spillover theory to better understand the context.

The Spillover Theory stated that experiences, emotions, and behaviors in one domain of life such as work can affect other domains, such as personal life (Nilsson et al., 2017). To some extent, the effects can spillover and occur in multiple directions and may positively or negatively influence other aspects of life, depending on the individual's situation and experiences. In this instance, positive aspects of work, such as recognition and appreciation, can increase satisfaction in one's personal life. In contrast, unsupportive working environment such as excessive job demands or lack of flexibility, may trigger negative spillover (Lee et al., 2021; Sok et al., 2014).

As stated above, RP_A expressed the expectation of a healthy work-life balance to avoid emotional exhaustion. This aligns with the research findings which indicates that maintaining certain balance between work and personal life is highly crucial for reducing the risk of depression (Krishna & Lakshmypriya, 2016; Nanda, 2015). In addition, RP_A also underscored the significance of self-development opportunities as a motivating factor that may stimulate positive spillover, in which positive and supportive working experiences (such as career development) can enhance one's personal life quality (Nilsson et al., 2017; Sirgy et al., 2001).

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, recognition is one of the motivating factors that can increase job satisfaction (Yashak et al., 2020). In this notion, Gen-Zs chose to value more the direct recognition than delayed forms of appreciation. This gesture symbolizes the necessity of quick validation from Gen-Z educators confirming their contributions in the workplace (Jagielska, 2022; Ramli et al., 2025). Furthermore, the theory also emphasizes the importance of workplace conditions in determining job satisfaction level. Thus, it combines two types of factors: motivating factors, which refer to intrinsic (internal) elements, and hygiene factors, which refer to extrinsic (external) elements (Combs et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Hygiene factors, which serve as prerequisites for motivating individuals, include elements such as the work environment, relationships with colleagues, leadership style, and job security (Akmen et al., 2024; Muttaqin, 2021; Muttaqin et al., 2023, 2024). These factors are considered essential in reducing the potential for decreased motivation while simultaneously supporting the presence of motivating factors such as recognition, which is particularly relevant for Gen-Zs.

Incorporating Technology in Workplace

RP_A also highlighted the importance of integrating technology into teaching and school management.

“Technology is essential in my career development and serves as the primary foundation because it allows me to access unlimited learning resources, communicate with students personally, and create interactive learning experiences. In addition, technology simplifies work, especially administrative tasks, for example, online grading systems and student data management. We, as Gen-Z, are already accustomed to technology, so in my opinion, training should be technology-based to make it more relevant.”

RP_A stated that technology helps create interactive learning experiences and enables more personalized ways of communicating and adjusting students' needs in creating more meaningful learning experiences. This indicates that technology not only enhances educator performance but also improves the quality of learning provided to students. In the context of career development, management must provide technological facilities that support learning innovation.

Gen-Z educators who are skilled in using technology can improve their performance, both in terms of teaching effectiveness and student satisfaction, because one way to increase productivity in an institution is through the use of technology (Sudiantini et al., 2023). In this digital era, rapid technological advancements offer many opportunities for institutions to enhance efficiency and innovation. Therefore, training and employee development in utilizing technology become essential so that they can keep up with these developments (Caporarello et al., 2020).

Institutional Support

RP_B stated that Gen-Z requires flexibility in their career pathways, without neglecting clarity of direction.

“to answer the question and the need of Gen-Zs for flexibility, we have actually planned career pathways that may help the Gen-Z educators to enhance their capability and quench their interests, not to forget that we maintain a clear conscience of aligning the development programs with the organization's goals”.

The above statement signifies the importance of flexibility Gen-Z educator development pathway which indicates that this generation expects certain freedom to explore their potential and interests within the work context. Flexibility refers to the ability to adapt to surrounding conditions and adjust to various existing situations (Bal & Izak, 2021; Galinsky et al., 2011). This aligns with the characteristics of Gen-Z, who tend to prioritize a balance between self-development and contributing to the organization. Flexibility not only means providing space for innovation but also ensuring that each individual has the opportunity to align their career path with their interests, skills, and personal goals (Khanna & Dutta, 2023; Nadya & Farozin, 2021).

However, it is important to emphasize that this flexibility must still be balanced with clarity of direction. Gen-Z tends to feel more motivated when they have clear guidance on

how their contributions impact the organization's goals (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Koochi et al., 2022). In other words, although they want freedom in determining their career steps, they still require a structured roadmap to achieve those goals. This reflects the importance of effective communication between the organization and educators to align individual goals with the institution's vision and mission (Ong & Mahazan, 2020; Tourish & Hargie, 2004).

Educational institutions can foster an inclusive and adaptive work environment by adopting a flexible approach that aligns with organizational goals. By providing room for exploration, Gen-Z educators may feel more valued and supported in their career development (Akmen et al., 2024; Putnam et al., 2014). This also contributes to increasing their loyalty to the organization, as they feel that their needs and aspirations are respected.

RP_A also explained how the institution where they work has attempted to support career development by adjusting its approach to align with the needs of Gen-Z.

“Our school has begun providing more modern training, such as mastering educational technology and social media training for learning. In addition, there is a mentoring system with senior teachers who help us understand challenges in the field,” the informant said.

However, they also mentioned that the support remains general and is not yet fully tailored to the unique needs of Gen-Z.

“Sometimes the training is too general, making it less relevant for us younger teachers who want hands-on practice or digital-based training,” they added.

Based on RP_A's statement, it is evident that the educational institution has shown concrete efforts to support the career development of Gen-Z educators through various programs. Programs such as educational technology training, social media training for learning, and intergenerational mentoring systems are positive steps that reflect the institution's awareness of the needs of the new generation. However, this support still has limitations, particularly because it is general in nature and not sufficiently targeted toward the specific needs of Gen-Z, such as their preferences for digital communication and personalized learning experiences.

Training that is too general is less relevant for Gen-Z, who tend to prefer approaches that are directly applicable and practice-oriented. This generation is more interested in training that allows them to immediately apply new skills in their daily work. For example, simulations involving the use of digital technology in teaching or managing virtual classrooms can have a more significant impact compared to theory-based training (Khanna & Dutta, 2023; Wullert et al., 2024).

In addition, RP_A also highlighted the importance of more relevant digital-based training. Gen-Z, with their characteristics as “digital natives,” have high expectations for training that integrates the latest technology (Fernandez-Cruz & Fernández-Díaz, 2016;

Rastati, 2018). If the training offered is not relevant or lacks practical application, it risks reducing their motivation and interest in participating in the program.

Educational institutions that proactively support the career development of Gen-Z educators will have a more productive and creative workforce. In the context of educational institutions, support such as technology-based training, cross-generational mentoring, and performance-based evaluation systems can serve as solutions (Aprilita, 2024; Lestari & Susilo, 2024). Sofyan et al. (2024) state that one of the factors influencing career development opportunities in educational institutions is the institution's own policies. However, the interview results indicate that these implementations still need to be adjusted to the unique needs of Gen-Z.

Distinctive Generational Traits in Career Development Approaches

In the interview, RP_A observed significant differences in the career development approaches between their generation and previous generations.

"Earlier generations of teachers focused more on years of experience to qualify for promotion." Now, my generation places greater emphasis on direct performance and innovation in teaching."

In addition, previous generations tended to have high loyalty to a single institution, whereas Gen-Z is more dynamic.

"We, Gen-Z, prefer institutions that support our development. If there is no room to grow, we tend to look for another place," they stated.

RP_A noted that previous generations relied more on the accumulation of years of experience to obtain promotions. This reflects traditional work values that emphasize stability, hierarchy, and loyalty to the organization. Gen-Z places greater emphasis on direct performance, tangible results, and innovation in teaching as the foundation for career development (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Khanna & Dutta, 2023; Wullert et al., 2024). They tend to be less patient in waiting long periods for promotion if their performance has already demonstrated significant results.

This is supported by Donald Super's theory of career development (Freeman, 1993; Super & Jordaan, 1973), which stated that career development is a continuous process that involves developing abilities and skills throughout one's lifetime. According to this theory, each generation has a different approach to career development, influenced by their unique values and preferences.

RP_A stated that Gen-Z prefers institutions that support their development. If there is no room for growth, they tend to look for opportunities elsewhere, as they seek environments that provide both personal and professional development to enhance their skills and career prospects. In Expectancy Theory by Vroom et al. (2015), it is explained that individuals will be motivated to exert effort if they believe that the effort will result in good performance and

lead to desired rewards. This theory emphasizes the importance of an individual's perception of the relationship between the effort they put in, the performance achieved, and the rewards received. This relationship becomes a key factor in determining a person's level of motivation, both in the context of work and in achieving personal goals (Negash et al., 2014; Siagian, 2018).

This reflects Gen-Z's need for flexibility and variety in their career paths, which differs from previous generations who tended to remain loyal to an organization even when career development opportunities were limited (Flatt & Drewery, 2023; Sari et al., 2024; Wullert et al., 2024). The traditional approach that prioritizes stability in career development may have been suitable for earlier generations, but it is not entirely relevant for Gen-Z, who have different needs and expectations.

In this era of rapid change, generational analysis-based career development management has emerged as an indispensable strategy. This approach not only helps in understanding the unique needs of Gen-Z educators but also promotes the creation of an inclusive and productive work environment. By paying attention to the characteristics of Gen-Z—who are adaptive, technology-oriented, and value work–life balance—educational institutions can significantly enhance educators' motivation and performance. This also serves as a long-term investment in improving the overall quality of education (Flatt & Drewery, 2023; Lestari & Susilo, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Generational based Career development management is a strategic and relevant approach to optimize the performance of Gen-Z educators. This generation has unique characteristics, such as familiarity with technology, a need for immediate recognition, and a desire to engage in continuous self-development. Therefore, managing their careers requires strategies that are flexible, innovative, and technology based. Through a career management approach grounded in generational analysis, educational institutions can create a work environment that supports the growth of Gen-Z educators. Consequently, the performance of educators can be optimized, which in turn will have a positive impact on the quality of learning and educational outcomes.

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