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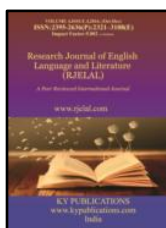
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MILLENNIAL LEARNERS-IS A NEW TEACHING STRATEGY REQUIRED?

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ABSTRACT

Millennial learners are very different from their past generations. Teachers need to understand their requirements and learning styles in order to make teaching-learning effective. Millennial learners are active multi-taskers who use technology very effortlessly. Sustaining their motivation and interest needs to be focused on. The biggest challenge noticed today is how to create ways to engage these students who exhibit limited attention span in the classroom. This requires teachers to take a relook at the teaching strategies and arrive at suitable methodologies. An inclusive learning environment has to be created with enough leverage for learners to engage in participative learning.

This paper gives an overview of the characteristics of millennial learners and strategies that can be adopted to make teaching-learning effective for this segment of learners.

Key words: Millennial learners, learning styles, multi-taskers, strategies, inclusive learning , environment

INTRODUCTION

An essential component of facilitating learning is, understanding the learners. As generations pass, teachers are faced with batches of students who are vastly different from their past students in a number of ways. Currently we are faced with millennial students. The learning styles, attitudes, and approaches of today's college students differ from those of past generations. Hence, understanding them poses a challenge to the teachers. Teachers who understand these learners and take into account these differences when designing and delivering courses, can do much to ensure students' success in their classes.

WHO ARE MILLENNIALS?

The millennial students or millennials are children who were born from 1981 to 2004 and are also known as Generation Y. The millennial students are strongly influenced by tools of Information

Technology. So, they can even be called IT kids. Here are certain views about millennial students:

A new generation of students has arrived . . . They carry an arsenal of electronic devices—the more portable the better. Raised amid a barrage of information, ... (Scott, 2005, A34)

Over the next decade, the Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged—with potentially seismic consequences . . . (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4)

CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS

One of the greatest influences on this generation is technology. Millennials are the only generation that has never lived without some type of technological gadget in their hands. These gadgets not only include the latest computers but also Black Berry, iPhone, iPad, PDA, Xbox, Hover Boards, PlayStations, etc. On a daily basis, for at least 7-8 hours a day, millennials are engaged in

some type of technological activity whether it's surfing the Internet; listening to music using a cell phone; or communicating with friends via Twitter, Facebook, Instant Messenger, Skype, Snapchat, FaceTime or WhatsApp.

This group of learners utilizes technology differently than generation X – their predecessors. Technology is intimately embedded in their lives; in fact, it is almost an extension of their bodies! And it is believed that they cannot survive without technology which has become one of their appendages.

The millennials exhibit certain characteristics which are enumerated here:

1. **Intelligent & confident-** The millennials are highly informed about a variety of subjects. They have access to vast repertoire of information on all areas. They are also aware of the opportunities available to them. In addition they are intelligent and can dwell deeply on any area that interests them and are also capable of taking informed decisions. They are highly confident and at times may also appear to be over confident.
2. **Multi-taskers-** They are capable of doing many tasks simultaneously even if the tasks are not related. If the subject matter is of interest to them, they can focus well and be effective so as to realize results.
3. **Risk takers/ adventurous-** Unlike previous generations, they are an adventurous lot as well as fun-loving. This makes them risk takers which also helps them to explore the untrodden path. They study certain aspects of a chosen field keenly and then arrive at decisions.
4. **Team players-** Compared to individual tasks, pair work or group work is preferred by these learners. Collaboration is their cup of tea and so they emerge as excellent team players. They are even capable of motivating their peers and contribute towards the success of their teams.
5. **Achievers-** Millennials are super achievers, provided they find the activity and learning matter to be interesting. They stay focused and work hard to achieve success. Many of them are street smart and are able to survive in challenging situations.
6. **Casual attitude-** These group of learners are characterized by a very casual attitude which may be detrimental to their success. Even in matters which will directly affect their future they do not seem to take things seriously. At times they choose certain courses or subjects but are not able to pursue and complete it because they are not serious and focused regarding it.
7. **Impatient-** Patience and millennials are things that are far apart. Impatience is their hallmark. In whatever matter it is, they seem to be in a hurry to get their job done and don't seem to exhibit any semblance of patience, to the extent of even appearing to be highly selfish. Much of this is due to the parental attention and doting tendency of parents. Similarly they expect to get whatever they want immediately without much delay because they have been pampered. They are unable to take 'no' for an answer and find it extremely difficult to cope with failure.
8. **Limited attention span-** Another characteristic feature of this generation is that they are unable to remain focused on anything for a very long time however interesting it is. The maximum attention span appears to be 20 minutes beyond which they seem to lose interest, and become fidgety. They start off certain activities with a lot of enthusiasm but their interest wanes off in a short while. They are unable to sustain their interest levels.
9. **Highly influenced by friends/peers-** Millennials are a peculiar group for whom friends are everything. They are their world even at the cost of their own parents. They are highly influenced by their friends and peers and all their decisions are based on the suggestions and opinions of their friends. Friends are their world and their word is godsend. Even parents are sidelined on many occasions.
10. **Spoon fed-** In the highly competitive world, every institution is bent on producing results in academics, placement etc. In such a scenario, the easiest way out employed right from school is to give ready-made materials to students, who then rote learn them and try to score high marks, as this will help them secure admissions

to good institutions. So for every subject, students expect to be spoon fed as it is easier for them too because they receive all study materials on a platter without much effort, unlike the previous generations who had to refer and gather study materials.

NEED OF THE HOUR

The challenge for teachers is to understand this new breed of learners and create a range of teaching techniques that is responsive to their needs and styles. Sustaining their motivation and interest needs to be focused on. The biggest challenge noticed today is how to create ways to engage students in the classroom to circumvent the challenge of their very short attention span. The lecture method cannot be relied on for this set of learners and innovative teaching and learning practices like ICT based modules should be adopted. Moreover, millennials are very friendly and expect a very informal learning environment. They expect the teachers to be very approachable and amenable. Due to this, many teachers communicate with students via mobiles, text messages or even on Facebook. But a word of caution here- limits must be set. In short, they prefer a relaxed learning environment.

STRATEGIES

Millennials definitely learn differently from the past generations. This requires teachers to take a relook at the teaching strategies and arrive at suitable methodologies based on the learning styles of this set of learners.

1. **Provide variety-** The millennial students will be greatly benefitted by adopting student centered inductive method. Activity Based Learning with a focus on minor learning points by practicing application oriented and skill based teaching will engender effective learning. Millennials turn to Google for anything and everything. Therefore, connecting course content to the current culture is a mighty challenge for teachers. They need to also make the learning outcomes and activities relevant (Price)
2. **Use of multimedia-** In order to tackle the challenge of fleeting attention span among the millennials, less of lecture and more use of modern technology should be encouraged to

increase learning in classrooms and also for assignments. Millennials seem to be more experiential and exploratory learners, so they 'benefit from the personalization and customization of assignments', Hartman says. Incorporating Facebook, Twitter, film clips, YouTube videos, podcasts and other platforms into their teaching will result in a successful learning environment.

3. **Collaborative learning modules-** Millennials prefer active engagement. Hence teachers need to make teaching relevant for which using only course content alone will not suffice. We ought to make use of humour, connect current lessons to real life, make use of current and relevant localized examples, authentic materials and practice Activity Based Learning (ABL). Pair work and group work is very successful amongst them.
4. **Immediate feedback-** This group of students is greatly benefitted when instant feedback is provided. The teachers can make use of self and peer feedback in addition to teacher feedback. Millennials are capable of analyzing and assessing other students' performance and give objective and constructive feedback. This in fact will go a long way in improving their performances too.
5. **Experiential and real-life learning opportunities-** A majority of millennials are highly interactive and so would love their classrooms to mirror this phenomenon. In addition, they prefer real life examples and issues to be taken up for debates and discussions in classes. Teachers as a result have to incorporate activities that involve a lot of interaction and lead to brain storming, problem solving and decision making situations. Hands-on experiences and real time projects work well with this set of learners.
6. **Teacher to become facilitator-** Gone are the days when the teachers's word was totally sacrosanct for a learner. Millennials do not take any information provided to them at face value. They are more involved in the application of the information gathered rather than the mere information itself. This has resulted in a shift in teacher's role from a mere disseminator of information to rather a facilitator for applying

this information. In this endeavour, one of the greatest challenges for teachers is to connect course content to the current culture and make learning outcomes and activities relevant as Price said.

CONCLUSION

Millennials are a very challenging set of learners who are smart and intelligent. So teachers also need to keep pace with their speed and need. Teachers are required to modify their teaching strategies and course delivery methods to rein in the potential and the learning styles of millennials. An inclusive learning environment has to be created with enough leverage for learners to engage in participative learning. For this, traditional teaching methods can be coupled with modern ICT based education using audio and visual presentations, written handouts, interactive tasks, and team work. In fact, the requirements of the millennial generation of learners are actually time-tested effective teaching-learning strategies employed by language practitioners.

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