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Generation Z's Attitude towards Literary Studies in Algerian Higher Education

موقف الجيل زد تجاه الدراسات الأدبية في التعليم العالي الجزائري

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Abstract

Student engagement solidified itself as a major precursor for academic growth and success across the past few decades. A learner who is behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally engaged will indisputably prosper academically. Still, the extent to which a learner is engaged is subject to multiple internal and external factors, including his or her perception of the subject matter being taught and the manner in which it is performed. In higher education for instance, a gradual deterioration of interest and enthusiasm towards classic text-based learning and literary studies has been globally observed among the latest generations of students. This study assesses the tremors of this phenomenon among generation Z literature learners at Chlef University's department of English through a mixed methods design built upon survey and direct classroom observation. The results indicate that a majority of the participants manifests little to no signs of interest towards the matter in question. The same results also point towards the existence of a causal relationship between students' exposure to technology, their perception of literature as a discipline, and their resulting disengagement and negative attitude towards it.

ملخص

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الجزائر،

التعليم العالي،

الجيل زد،

تفاعل الطلاب،

الأدب...

رسخ انخراط الطلاب نفسه كبشير رئيسي للنمو الأكاديمي والنجاح عبر العقود القليلة الماضية. الطالب المنخرط سلوكيا، عاطفيا، و بشكل إدراكي في دراسته سوف يزدهر حتما في مشواره الدراسي. مع ذلك، فإن مدى انخراط الطلاب يمكن أن يخضع لعوامل داخلية وخارجية متعددة، بما في ذلك موقفهم تجاه الموضوع المدرس والطريقة التي يتم بها ذلك. في التعليم العالي على سبيل المثال، لوحظ تدهور تدريجي في الاهتمام والتفاعل تجاه الدراسات الأدبية بين الأجيال الأخيرة من الطلاب على المستوى العالمي. تقيم هذه الدراسة اهتزازات هذه الظاهرة على المستوى المحلي، خصيصا بين طلاب أدب الجيل زد على مستوى قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الشلف. اعتمد هذا البحث على تصميم طرق مختلطة مبني على الدراسة الاستقصائية و المراقبة المباشرة للطلبة أثناء سير الدرس. تشير النتائج النهائية إلى أن غالبية المشاركين يظهرون القليل من علامات الاهتمام بالمسألة المعنية أو لا تظهر على الإطلاق. تشير النتائج نفسها أيضا إلى إمكانية وجود علاقة سببية بين تعرض الطلاب للتكنولوجيا وإدراكهم للأدب كمنهج، وموقفهم السلبي تجاهه و الانسحاب الناتجان عن ذلك.

1. introduction

Student engagement has established itself as a major precursor for academic growth and success over the years. Indeed, a learner who is behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally engaged in a particular subject matter will inevitably prosper academically. On the contrary, a similarly disengaged student will fail miserably at any given academic endeavor. This raises the inquiry of whether or not this engagement only emerges from the student's will to study. Although several factors might influence students' level of engagement, including their own willingness to study, most of the relevant data seem to agree on the fact that this responsibility mostly falls upon the teacher's shoulders, as supported by Anita Grove (2019): "Teachers who perceive that it is their responsibility to engage students will find ways to engage and motivate students" (Grove, 2019). This being said, capturing and maintaining learners' attention throughout an entire lecture has recently evolved to become a nearly impossible task for teachers of most disciplines. In higher education for instance, this problem can be predominantly observed within what can sometimes be regarded as "ill-perceived" fields of interest such as literary studies, specifically when contemporary students are involved. Indeed, Generation Z, also commonly referred to as the iGeneration, is known for being the first digital generation that hasn't known a world without the internet, smartphones and social media. Still, despite their nature, most online statistics and articles seem to point towards the fact that, be it by means of e-books, audiobooks, or physical copies, specimens from this generation still maintain a few reading habits although most of it is presumably done for academic purposes rather than pure pleasure. This prompted authors and publishers to redefine the concept of reading as it was previously known. Consequently, contemporary literary works are being both proportionally and thematically constructed to fit the interests and shorter attention spans of said generation.

Literature has made its proofs as an essential stimulant for language teaching learning over the years. It represents an opportunity for language learners to transcend time and space and explore anterior cultures

directly in the target language. It has therefore been implemented by most educational institutions around the world as a fundamental component of their curricula. However, convincing contemporary foreign language learners of its importance often turns out to be a dead end, especially when they are compelled to study texts and materials that they often deem as outdated and no longer relevant to their lifestyle and future

This study is empirical in nature. It primarily peeks into students' attitude towards the study of literature. More accurately, it represents an attempt to measure the extent to which present-day literature students are behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively engaged towards literary studies. It is conducted at the University of Chlef within the department of English among literature learners whose age ranges from 19 to 26 and who can be regarded as generation Z. The process of data collection is achieved by means of direct classroom observation and questionnaires. The former assesses students' behavioral engagement by recording their on-task and off-task behaviors throughout the lecture while the latter is composed of a series of semi-structured statements oriented towards students' cognitive and emotional standpoint, their perception of the subject matter, and other factors potentially leading to their disengagement. The above procedure is framed by the following research questions: Can contemporary higher education learners in Algeria be regarded as generation Z? If so, are Algerian generation Z students eagerly engaged and interested in literary studies? If not, what could be the possible factors leading to their disengagement from the matter in question? As a hypothesis, it is presumed that globalization and the rise of technology makes Algerian students legitimate adherents of the generational cohort known as "generation Z", and that their consequent lifestyles, personality traits, and technological tendencies might have tainted upon their learning styles and receptiveness towards the way literature is conventionally taught. This research concludes by suggesting and discussing potential countermeasures to engage recapture Algerian generation z students' attention and interest towards the study of literature.

II. Literature Review

The following section serves as a theoretical framework and an account of the major concepts mentioned within this study. It also glances into some of what has been previously discovered in terms of the relationship between generation Z students' features and their attitude towards their studies.

1. Student Engagement

Due to its fluid and metamorphic nature, student engagement undertook multiple alterations before reaching its current form. It was initially introduced in the 1980s as “the theory of involvement” by Professor and psychologist Alexander Astin, who proposed it as a means of evaluating the extent to which students are physically and psychologically dedicated to their academic experience (Astin, 1984). Then in 1993, Skinner and Belmont described it as the quality of maintaining “sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by positive emotional tone” (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Thereafter, student engagement began to be regarded as a tridimensional concept involving a state of cognitive, affective, and behavioral commitment that learners need to adopt in order to thrive academically. Witnessing its growing eminence, Fredricks et al. (2004) reported that over the years, “the concept of student engagement has attracted increasing attention as representing a possible antidote to declining academic motivation and achievement” (Fredricks et al., 2004). Although the concept in question failed to acquire a clear and concise definition over the years, multiple online sources seem to agree with the description provided by The Glossary of Education Reform. This latter defines student engagement as: “the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education”. The same source also argues that: “student engagement is predicated on the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise ‘disengaged’” (*Student Engagement*, 2016).

2.1. The Dimensions of Student Engagement

As previously hinted, student engagement is a multi-layered concept. It consists of three distinct yet equally important dimensions identified by Fredricks et al. in 2004, namely; behavioral, cognitive, and affective or emotional engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Although most of the research found on the subject clearly relies on the previously mentioned tridimensional division of student engagement, a few other classifications also confirmed the existence of additional facets such as academic or social engagement. However, these latter are often either intrinsic or consequential to the initial dimensions. For instance, students' social engagement refers to their ability to bond and interact effectively with their peers and the academic staff, which can assumably be regarded as the manifestation of a successful balance between affective and behavioral engagement.

1.1.1. Behavioral Engagement

As suggested by its name, students' behavioral engagement is concerned with the physical manifestation of their commitment towards their studies. It encompasses multiple factors related to their physical demeanor within the learning environment including their attendance, attention, active participation, body language, and general behavior throughout the lecture. A behaviorally engaged learner will consider and comply to the mentioned qualities while showing little to no signs of disruptive demeanors within the learning environment. Gonzalez et al., also argue that some of the most visible indicators of students' behavioral engagement in the academic context are “planning, effort, on-task attention, concentration, hard work, persistence, time expended, attendance, voluntary participation, task involvement, and... [compliance with] classroom rules and norms” (González et al., 2015).

1.1.2. Cognitive Engagement

This type of engagement represents the direct consequence of students' psychological devotion towards their academic experience. It is defined as “the extent to which students' are willing and able to take on the learning task at hand. This includes the amount of effort students are willing to invest in

working on the task (Corno & Mandinach, 1983), and how long they persist (Richardson and Newby 2006; Walker et al. 2006). In simpler terms, it can be characterized as “a psychological state in which students put in a lot of effort to truly understand a topic and in which students persist studying over a long period of time” (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011). Multiple online sources also seem to agree on the fact that students’ concentrated attention, curiosity, interest, and their perception of the performed academic tasks’ relevance to their future and academic growth, also represent essential components and indicators of their cognitive engagement towards their studies.

1.1.3. Affective Engagement

Students’ affective engagement involves the emotional aspect of their dedication to their studies. It examines and assesses the extent to which a positive sentimental outlook towards their academic experience might influence their perseverance and eventual success. It has been explained by Joel E. Pagán (2018) as the way in which students experience positive feelings such as amusement, happiness, and pride within their respective academic environment. According to the same source, this type of engagement also includes, “students’ feelings toward school, expressing interest, reporting fun and excitement, feeling safe, having positive relationships with teachers and peers, having a supportive family, expressing feelings of belonging, and perceiving school as valuable” (Pagán, 2018). This highlights the existence of a thin line between cognitive and affective engagement which complicates the task of distinguishing between them as both types are known for encompassing a number of slightly similar aspects related to students’ mindset and perceptions, which differ in the literature from one source to another in terms of classification and is subject to debate to this day.

2.2. Phillip Schlechty’s Levels of Student Engagement

Education researcher and author Phillip Schlechty had his own perception and categorization of the several ways in which students respond and adapt to their academic experience. In 2002, he identified the five following major levels of student engagement:

- Authentic Engagement: Being the highest achievable

form of student engagement, this level balances between both high attention and high commitment. In this level, the students fully perceive the importance of the activity and are more than willing to persevere and learn when faced with difficulty.

- Strategic Compliance: This level is characterized by both a high attention and a low commitment. In this level, students attribute the value to the compensation (marks, grades) that results from completing the task rather than the task itself while seeking recognition and peer appreciation. If the work does not ensure such tokens, it will be disregarded.

- Ritual Compliance: This level involves a low attention with little to no signs of commitment. Students are only willing to perform at the minimum requirements in terms of effort and engagement with the primary objective of avoiding negative consequences such as bad marks and oral punishment.

- Retreatism: This form of engagement is characterized by a total absence of both attention and commitment. In this level, students fail to perceive the value and relevance of the task at hand and are consequently both emotionally and cognitively disengaged from it. Although they do not participate in the development of the lesson, they still do not show any signs of disruptive behavior towards it.

- Rebellion: As hinted by its name, this level involves a completely diverted attention accompanied by a total absence of commitment towards the task at hand. In this state, the students usually rebel and refuse to comply to what is expected from them while behaving in a way that disrupts their peers and alters the development of the lesson (Schlechty, 2002).

2.3. The Teacher’s Role in Student Engagement

Be it online or within a classroom setting, constructing an effective and engaging learning atmosphere can often prove to be an arduous task. This problem is predominantly observable when certain conditions are met. For instance, generation Z students and their perception of reading-based disciplines such as literary studies represent two of the mentioned conditions. Indeed, compelling a generation of students who grew up with a smartphone on their hand to read and

study classical literary texts and concepts is usually easier said than done. Still, as described by Art Kohn (2014), “Teaching is an aerobic sport, and if done well, you can make any material engaging. On the other hand, if... [performed] poorly, any material can be made dull” (Kohn, 2014). Anita Grove (2019) also supports this by arguing that “teachers who perceive that it is their responsibility to engage students will find ways to engage and motivate students” (Grove, 2019). This reinforces the fact that sparking students’ interest towards a given discipline is a responsibility that mostly falls upon the teacher’s shoulders. If this latter wishes to see his learners flourish in their studies, he or she has to find innovative and relevant ways to engage them behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively.

After witnessing that the interviewed instructors had distinct perceptions of what engagement is, and that most of said perceptions were centered on behavioral engagement while discarding the other two dimensions (cognitive and affective), the above cited source also suggests that “the ability to engage and motivate students comprises more than knowledge of the subject matter; [in fact,] teachers should possess affective characteristics that improve their ability to design instruction that engages students.”. She then concluded by arguing that “instructional practices should be as varied as the diverse population of students that exists within the classroom. If teachers really care and are committed to their responsibility, instructional strategies will be intentional, which means you have to know something about the children you serve.” (Grove, 2019). This supports the fact that generation Z students cannot be taught in the same way their predecessors were. Their expectations and technologically altered learning styles makes them unresponsive and significantly less engaged towards most reading-based materials or subjects and the conventional pedagogies through which they are taught.

2. Who Is Generation Z?

Categorizing large groups of people within one single description depending on their date of birth would be a blatant act of generalization considering how each individual is unique no matter the generational

demographic he or she originates from. Still, external factors such as the omnipresence of technology often render the majority of these individuals more prone to sharing similar attributes and behaviorisms. This can be clearly detected among contemporary young adults. Commonly referred to as the digital natives, these latter represent what is nowadays denominated as generation Z; which broadly refers to the children born between 1996 and 2012 according to most online dictionaries. Zoomers, as some people also refer to them, have never known a world without technology. They grew up within environments comprised of all sorts of technological gadgets such as TVs, computers, and of course, the Internet. This makes them a slightly more familiarized with technological appendices than their predecessors; the millennials (generation Y), as these latter mostly had to embrace and adapt to technology at the latest stage of their adolescence, particularly in the local context.

Generation Z students embark all the evoked quirks towards their respective educational environments and institutions. The earliest specimens of the generation, who happen to be today’s higher education students, are often strangers to the concept of physical copies of books and papers. In the case of EFL literature for instance, most of the needed resources; including novels, poems, dictionaries, and handouts, are brought to the classroom by means of smartphones and laptops. Their familiarity with technology also often makes them accustomed to selecting more pragmatic, time-saving, and cost-effective alternatives (audiobooks, summaries, audio-visual adaptations of literary texts...) to grasp and achieve an understanding of the studied materials and literary concepts. Their visual, mobile, and digital nature makes them pedagogically necessitous and sometimes incompatible with the conventional ways of knowledge transmission, henceforth the concept of learning styles.

2.1. The Learning Styles & Strategies of Generation Z Students

Needless to say, peculiar attitudes and personalities call for peculiar approaches in knowledge transmission and acquisition. Indeed, generation Z students are known for being less responsive to

the traditional teaching and learning methods, as supported by Dumitrita Iftode (2019): “It is obvious that the “old way” of schooling is no longer effective with the new generation of students. The values of today’s students are not congruent with traditional content and methods. Theoretical approaches that merely focus on textbooks are likely to be perceived as boring” (Iftode, 2019). The students in question exploit and rely on unprecedented strategies and resources to support both their academic journey and external learning activities. Mostly dependent on technology, these strategies and resources often allow them to spend the least amount of time and effort possible on their learning activities, which has visibly become the main concern of the majority of contemporary students.

A learning style is generally regarded as an individual’s preferred mode of absorbing and processing new information whereas a learning strategy refers to “an individual’s way of organizing and using a particular set of skills in order to learn content or accomplish other tasks more effectively and efficiently in school as well as in non-academic settings” (Schumaker & Deshler, 1992). By being aware of these two variables, teachers can adapt their *modus operandi* to better cope with their learners’ preferences and maximize their chances of reaching the desired learning outcomes. This type of awareness is all the more needed with the latest generations. Moreover, higher education instructor Priya Thomas (2019) observed that:

While other generations had to learn new technology as it emerged, Generation Z students are tech natives, meaning technology... has been a part of their lives from day one. They grew up with easy and quick access to information at any time of day in variety of forms, so tools that are accessible are extremely important for this group. (Thomas, 2019)

After to several years of experience among higher education students, she also declared:

Learning tools that are visual are a match, too. Generation Z learns best with material that is on-demand, so mixed media (including mobile and video) are their... [priority] for learning. For example, 90% of Generation Z students surveyed in the Generation Z

Goes to College study reported their primary platform for new information was YouTube. In addition, these students find digital textbooks to be more engaging and cost-effective tools than traditional textbooks. (Thomas, 2019)

3. Technology’s Impact on Attention Spans

Despite the abundance of resources and information that it provides, technology is nowadays regarded as a double-edged sword. Among its many inconveniences can be found the progressive decline of its users’ attention spans. American psychologist and computer scientist Herbert Simon diagnosed this problem as early as the 1970s when he argued that “in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention” (Simon, 1971). The Britannica Dictionary defines the attention span as: “the length of time during which someone is able to think about or remain interested in something”. It also refers to the amount of time a person can remain concentrated on a task while avoiding distractions.

At its apogee, technology has recently made the above discussed problem particularly observable among the latest generations of young adults. For instance, most of the studies and statistics found online agree on the fact that generation Z has an average attention span of 8 seconds, hence the emergence of video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts. These latter adjusted to this phenomenon by limiting the length of their audio-visual content and adopting a short video format which consists of videos that generally do not exceed a minute or two. Consequently, both platforms achieved immense success among both generation Z and its successor (generation Alpha), with the former representing more than 64% of their daily users according to online statistics.

One might ask, what does the above have to do with education? In reality, when considering the fact that higher education institutions are nowadays mostly populated by the generation in question, students’ attention is, as described by Art Kohn (2014), “an

important variable since people with longer attention spans are able to be more creative, make fewer errors, and are more likely to achieve their goals” (Kohn, 2014). For instance, in 2012 a survey conducted on British grounds concluded that children’s attention spans are rapidly decreasing. The study involved 410 teachers of English and 2000 parents of children aging from 2 to 11. The survey reported that 91% of the involved teachers drew a direct link between children’s decreasing attention spans and the fact that they usually they opt for screen-based activities over conventional reading, which stands as the first proof of an existing connection between shorter attention spans and technology exposure according to neuroscientist Susan Greenfield, who firmly believes that “the use of digital technologies is reshaping human brains and the impact on young people [who grew up knowing nothing else,] must be considered by their parents and educators” (Brech, 2020). Furthermore, another study conducted by the British unit of advertising discovered that the average person shifts their attention between their smartphone, tablet and laptop at least 21 times within a single hour. This might reinforce the extent to which these gadgets influence present-day students’ behavior.

III. Methods & Procedures

This section provides an overview of the fundamental components relevant to and the *modus operandi* adopted by this research.

1. The Research Design

Through a mixed method design, this study investigates the extent to which the studied groups of Algerian literature learners adhere to the generational demographic known as generation Z in terms of habitual patterns and generic standpoint towards the study of literature. It evaluates these latter’s levels of behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement by means of structured classroom observation and a semi-structured questionnaire across multiple sessions scattered over a duration of three weeks.

2. The Participants

As implied by the main title, this study primarily targets students who are members of generation Z, whose age ranges from 19 to 25, and who happen to

be the primary constituent of today’s higher education in Algeria. Still, the selected age spectrum involves an overly extensive number of participants, which is why four sample groups of Algerian EFL literature learners have been selected regardless of their degree and gender. Upon a thorough investigation of schedule and availability, two groups of bachelor’s students, in addition to two other groups of Masters students were nominated for the deployment of the study. The former were examined throughout a general literature session whereas the latter were studied while having a lecture in comparative literature.

3. The Research Instruments

In an attempt to evaluate the levels of behavioral engagement displayed by the target participants, the observation phase of this study relied on a behavioral engagement observation tool inspired and readapted from a relevant doctoral dissertation (Grove, 2019). As shown on appendix A, this tool makes it possible to report students’ on-task and off-task behaviors as the lecture progresses. It pays particular attention to positive demeanors such as listening, asking questions, and notetaking, in addition to negative ones such as daydreaming, sleeping, skipping class, chatting, and other disruptive behaviors. However, simultaneously observing and recording such behaviors within a classroom of twenty-five or more students goes far beyond the capabilities of a single observer, no matter how attentive he or she might be. Consequently, the selected observation tool has been readapted to shed light on selected specimens from the front, middle and back row of each examined sample group, thus, expanding the study across the whole room while still sustaining the feasibility and diversification of the results. The observed participants are ordered horizontally and assigned an alphabetical letter from left to right (A, B, C, D) for the sake of anonymity. The selected tool also includes a second optional middle row section in case the other rows fail to bestow the minimal requirements in terms of number of participants.

Unlike behavioral engagement, cognitive and emotional engagement were measured using a reconditioned version of the student course

engagement questionnaire due to their palpable nature. As shown on appendix (B), the used SCEQ involves a total of thirteen assertions; which include behaviors, thoughts, and feelings upon which students commented by means of five Likert-type scale responses ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me). The questionnaire also incorporates additional items aimed at investigating students' reading habits, technology usage, perception of the studied subject, and the way they are usually taught literature. For the sake of transparency, the survey collected anonymous responses. The only personal information the participants are asked to provide within the questionnaire are their group and age. This latter was requested to confirm their adherence to the generational demographic known as "generation Z".

4. The Procedure

Following the obtention of the administration's approval, the field study of this research paper was deployed upon the department of English within the Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef. It solicited the cooperation of two literature instructors, each of whom was in charge of one undergraduate and one masters group of learners, amassing a total of four sample groups of approximately twenty specimens for the investigation, two of which were enrolled within the course of general literature (BA) while the other two specialized in comparative literature (MA).

Upon agreeing to cooperate, the volunteering instructors allowed the researcher to attend their lectures as a passive observer. This latter sat at the back of the room; often one or two rows in the middle behind the back benchers of the group, for a wider view of the room. Then, using the behavioral engagement observation tool, he observed the selected specimens across fractions of five to ten minutes throughout a two-hour long lecture while reporting the students' on-task and off-task behavior in relation to the task performed by their teacher.

The volunteering teachers also initially agreed to spare the last ten minutes of their sessions for the distribution and completion of the questionnaire. This latter was consequently administered to the students

by the researcher right before the lecture reached its conclusion following the completion of the observational phase. However, unlike the behavioral engagement observation tool, this questionnaire didn't not limit the number of its respondents to the front, middle and back row students. It rather sought and collected the testimony of the whole group by virtue of its feasibility and convenience to allow for the diversity and generalization of the final results.

5. The Limitations

As most research usually is, this study has been subject to a number of limitations that prevented it from reaching even more conclusive results. The first one being the pandemic (COVID-19) and the ensuing preventive measures enforced by the ministry of health and undertaken by department of English. These measures included a biweekly intermittence schedule, upon which each EFL specialty was given two weeks of study followed by two weeks of inactivity, which limited the duration of the study to the last three weeks (total of five weeks) prior to the official holidays. Another safety measure that partially hindered the results was social distancing and the group division that resulted from it, as each group was split into two subgroups, thus halving the number of volunteering instructors and participants that could have been potentially involved. This study also hypothesizes that the resultant seating arrangements might as well have altered the results of the observational phase, as pairs of students sitting together are usually even more prone to disruptive behavior and earlier disengagement.

Considering the involved circumstances and out of respect for students' confidentiality and morals, video recording was discarded from the field study. This instrument, in tandem with the behavioral observation tool, could have significantly facilitated the process of evaluating the participant's levels of behavioral engagement. Consequently, the absence of recorded footage makes it impossible to track the same participant across multiple sessions due to the simple fact that students constantly change seats, which is reflected by the anonymous manner through which they are referred to on the observation tool. All

the above led to each sample group being observed for only one session.

IV. The Findings of the Study

After an eventful observational phase and a thorough examination of the survey results, this study came across a number of thought-provoking occurrences among the studied specimens. This section reviews the main findings that can be drawn from the data collected by the field study's behavioral observation tool and survey questionnaire.

1. The Behavioral Observation Results

As initially anticipated, the first fifteen to twenty minutes of each session were spent in a positive learning atmosphere characterized by students' undivided attention towards their teachers and what they had to offer. Active participation and note-taking were also at their peak, with little to no sign of disruptive behaviors shown by students. These latter, at the exception of a few specimens at the furthest back, were quietly listening, responding to questions, sharing ideas, and reading when prompted. However, past the twenty minutes point, disinterest and indifference began to be more and more palpable across the back half of the classroom. Although the two front rows seemed to sustain their attention forward for slightly longer, a gradual manifestation of detached behaviors was witnessed predominantly among students sitting at the middle and the back rows. This is assumably due to the fact that the middle and back rows are mostly occupied by latecomers and often unserious students whereas the front ones are initially taken by the hardworking students.

Sitting at the back has allowed the researcher to detect a number of quite unusual behaviors. Indeed, past half an hour to forty minutes, the majority of students started displaying severely irrelevant and often disruptive demeanor. Laughing and discussing unrelated topics became more frequent, even at the front rows. Students occupying the side seats were occasionally seen looking outside and contemplating nature through the windows. The male students sitting at the back were either sleeping, doodling, or chatting emphatically. Some of them were seen clipping their nails and passing the nail clipper to their comrades.

Meals were also shared between the tables. The female students who sat at the back were no exception. Some of these latter were spotted watching YouTube videos, communicating on social media platforms, taking selfies, fixing their scarves, and even renewing their makeup on several occasions. Notetaking took a halt among most of these students while some of them still maneuvered their pens pretending to be noting down what their teachers were explaining and dictating.

Although the gender factor has been discarded from this study, it is worth noting that female students, especially the ones sitting at the middle and back rows, have proved to be even more prone to specific behaviors such as smartphone usage, social media consultation, and self-inspection by means of taking selfies compared to their male counterparts who frequently displayed slightly more technologically-detached demeanors such as doodling, daydreaming, or simply sleeping. Another noteworthy detail is that the studied groups which involved a considerably lower number of students performed better than their counterparts in terms of sustained attention and general conduct with little to no disruptive behavior. This is probably due to the fact that a less crowded group usually incites its students to occupy the frontmost seats, which makes them more exposed and less prone to obvious disruptive behaviorisms. This being said, these same students still manifested obvious signs of disengagement past a certain point across the session although it took place in a quieter and much less disruptive fashion.

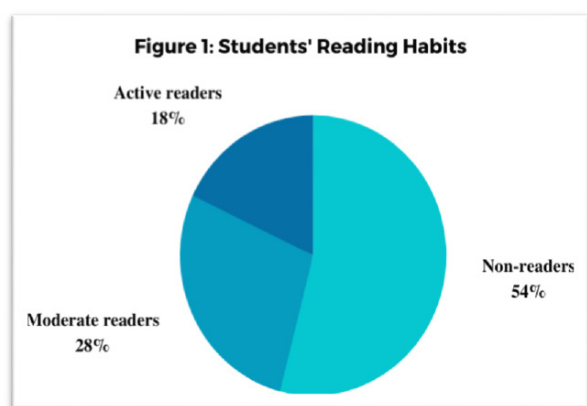
2. The Survey Data

Similar to the observational tool, the survey attained fairly conclusive results in terms of students' reading habits, technology usage, and their cognitive and emotional standpoint towards literary studies. This section reviews and comments on the data obtained from the participants via this survey.

2.1. The Participants' Reading Habits

Surprisingly enough, nearly half of the involved participants described themselves as occasional readers although most of them answered "moderately characteristic of me" to the statement "I read books on my free time". Still, some of these latter's

declarations happen to be inconsistent with the rest of their testimony when considering the fact that most of them also declared relying on online summaries and audio-visual adaptations instead of reading the full text for the sake of understanding the involved literary text. This suggests that most of their external reading activities are based upon texts and books which are assumably unrelated to their academic curriculum, which raises the issue of text selection within the EFL literature curriculum.



2.2. The Participants' Perception of Literary Studies

From an affective perspective, nearly one third of the involved participants described literature as useful and interesting and deemed the study of literary texts as an amusing and enjoyable task, whereas the majority simply failed to grasp its utility and even declared occasionally experiencing feelings of frustration and anxiety throughout the process. Similarly, this same majority also acknowledged perceiving the studied texts as boring, outdated, and incompatible with their tastes, while describing the involved literary language as discouraging and often difficult to understand.

Cognitively speaking, more than half of the respondents reported not being able to perceive the relevance and applicability of the notions they learn while studying literature to their own future and daily lives, which also reflects their inability to relate to the story and the characters who unfold it. This same portion also disclosed the difficulty they often face when trying to remain focused and attentive for the total duration of the session, thus intermittently losing focus and getting distracted by external and unrelated thoughts whilst studying literary texts. It is also important to mention that these same students

reported that their sessions usually consist of reading and analyzing selected passages taken from literary texts, which was occasionally witnessed during the observational stage of the field study.

Another conclusive fact reflected by the survey's data is how interconnected students' familiarity with technology and the way they approach literary studies are. Statistically speaking, more than 85% of the studied respondents have declared spending a substantial amount of time using technology and social media platforms on a daily basis for both entertainment and external learning activities. The exact same respondents also acknowledged relying on online summaries, analyses, and audio-visual adaptations of the studied literary texts before taking the exam as an alternative of reading the full text.

V. Discussion & Conclusion

1. Discussion & Suggestions

As it can be inferred from the reviewed literature and the results obtained by this study, generation Z stands as more than a mere western concept. The ascent and omnipresence of technology and its cultural dissemination through social media platforms has made people who are culturally distinct and geographically distant more prone to sharing similar behavioral patterns and psychological traits. Being vivid consumers of technology, the latest generation of Algerian students is no exception, as they embody the same symptoms and mannerisms that are being reported by instructors from the western world, which makes them authentic adherents to the generational cohort known as "generation Z".

Similar to their foreign counterparts, generation Z students in Algeria have a strong tendency for relying on technology and online resources for the sake of complementing their academic journey and growth. In the case of literature students for instance, the studied participants visibly opt for simpler, quicker and more accessible and appealing alternatives to performing a full-scale reading of a given literary text, which can, to a certain extent, be regarded as a form of self-regulated learning. This was particularly more discernible among the youngest participants, as bachelor students provided an even more technology-oriented testimony

and a stronger reluctance towards the conventional study of literature compared to their older, though similarly classified comrades, whose answers often involved a slight hesitation. Consequently, it is safe to assume that the more technology progresses and expands, the less relevant certain disciplines are going to become, i.e., the more a student is immersed within technology, the less responsive he or she is going to be to the conventional methods of knowledge transmission and acquisition, which seems inevitable unless appropriate countermeasures are provided.

Considering the above, treating generation Z students in the same fashion as their predecessors would be a pedagogical failure, especially when handling often ill-perceived subjects such as literature. Thus, sparking the interest of Algerian literature learners; who have been diagnosed as emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally deficient in terms of engagement towards the study of literature, might involve a special treatment based on the common approach of “fighting fire with fire”. Indeed, though technology is a primary culprit behind altering literature students’ learning styles and preferences, its numerous positive sides cannot

simply be disregarded. Therefore, cloud-based animation platforms such as Vyond for instance represent a potential tide-shifting instrument for teachers of literature. Provided they are digitally literate, this tool allows them to rejuvenate their lessons by recreating scenes taken from literary texts and transforming them into audio-visual animations involving the exact same characters, settings, and interactions described within the original work. This, in addition to the selection of literary texts that are more historically and thematically relatable, could prove to be a potential solution to the observed phenomenon of students’ affective, cognitive, and behavioral disengagement from the study of literature.

2. Conclusion

As initially hypothesized, this study concluded that Algerian higher education learners can indeed be regarded as “generation Z”. The surveyed specimens perfectly adhere to the generational cohort in question in terms of technology dependency and preferred

learning styles and strategies. This often renders them unresponsive to the conventional methods of knowledge transmission and acquisition, which hinders their perception and academic performance when reading-based disciplines such as literary studies are involved. If seen through Schlechty’s lenses, the majority of the observed participants seemed to have adopted a stance of ritual compliance with more than one third manifesting signs of strategic compliance. Though rarely, learners who seemed fully engaged were still observed within the sample groups. Equally rare were the one who showed signs of rebellion, as most of the disengaged students adopted a stance of retreatism instead, showing no signs of attention or commitment while refraining from disturbing their peers. To reiterate, the studied literature learners were indeed deficient in terms of affective, cognitive, and behavioral engagement towards the study of literature.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that there are no conflicts of interest to be disclosed.

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• Appendices

Appendix A: Behavioral Engagement Observation Tool

Student Engagement Observation Tool													On Task Behaviors	
Class observed:				Date:				Start Time:					Asking questions	AQ
Absentees:								End Time:					Following request	FR
Time													Hands on activity	HA
T Task													Listening	L
Student													On task	OT
Front row	A												Paying attention	PA
	B												Reacting	R1
	C												Reading	R2
	D												Responding to questions	R3
Middle row	A												Taking notes	TN
	B												Off Task Behaviors	
	C												Disturbing others	DO
	D												Doing work for another class	DOW
Middle row 2	A												Inattentive	In
	B												Intermittent participation	IP
	C												Out of Room	OR
	D												Out of Seat	OS
Back row	A												Playing	PL
	B												Quiet	Q
	C												Sleeping	SL
	D												Talking	TK
Notes:														

Appendix B: Student Engagement Survey**Date:****Group:****Participant's age:**

To what extent do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you? Rate each utterance using the following scale:

5 = very characteristic of me
4 = characteristic of me
3 = moderately characteristic of me
2 = not really characteristic of me
1 = not at all characteristic of me

- a. _____ I read books on my free time.
- b. _____ I consider studying literature as an amusing and enjoyable task.
- c. _____ We usually study literature by analyzing selected passages from literary texts.
- d. _____ Studying literature is useful and interesting.
- e. _____ Studying literature makes me frustrated and anxious sometimes.
- f. _____ I spend a considerable amount of time using technological devices and social media for both entertainment and external learning activities.
- g. _____ I find it difficult to remain focused and attentive for the whole session while studying literature.
- h. _____ I find the language used within the studied texts discouraging and difficult to understand.
- i. _____ I perceive the novels that we study as outdated, boring, and incompatible with my taste.
- j. _____ The notions I learn while studying such novels are applicable and relevant to my own future and lifestyle.
- k. _____ I usually lose focus and get distracted by external thoughts while studying literature.
- l. _____ In order to understand the story, I sometimes rely on the movie/cartoon version of the studied novel instead of reading the whole text.
- m. _____ I rely on online summaries and analyses of literary texts shortly before taking the exam.

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